ENGAGING BOOKS

J. M. Edelstein [1924–1996]

Interviewed by Richard Cándida Smith

Art History Oral Documentation Project

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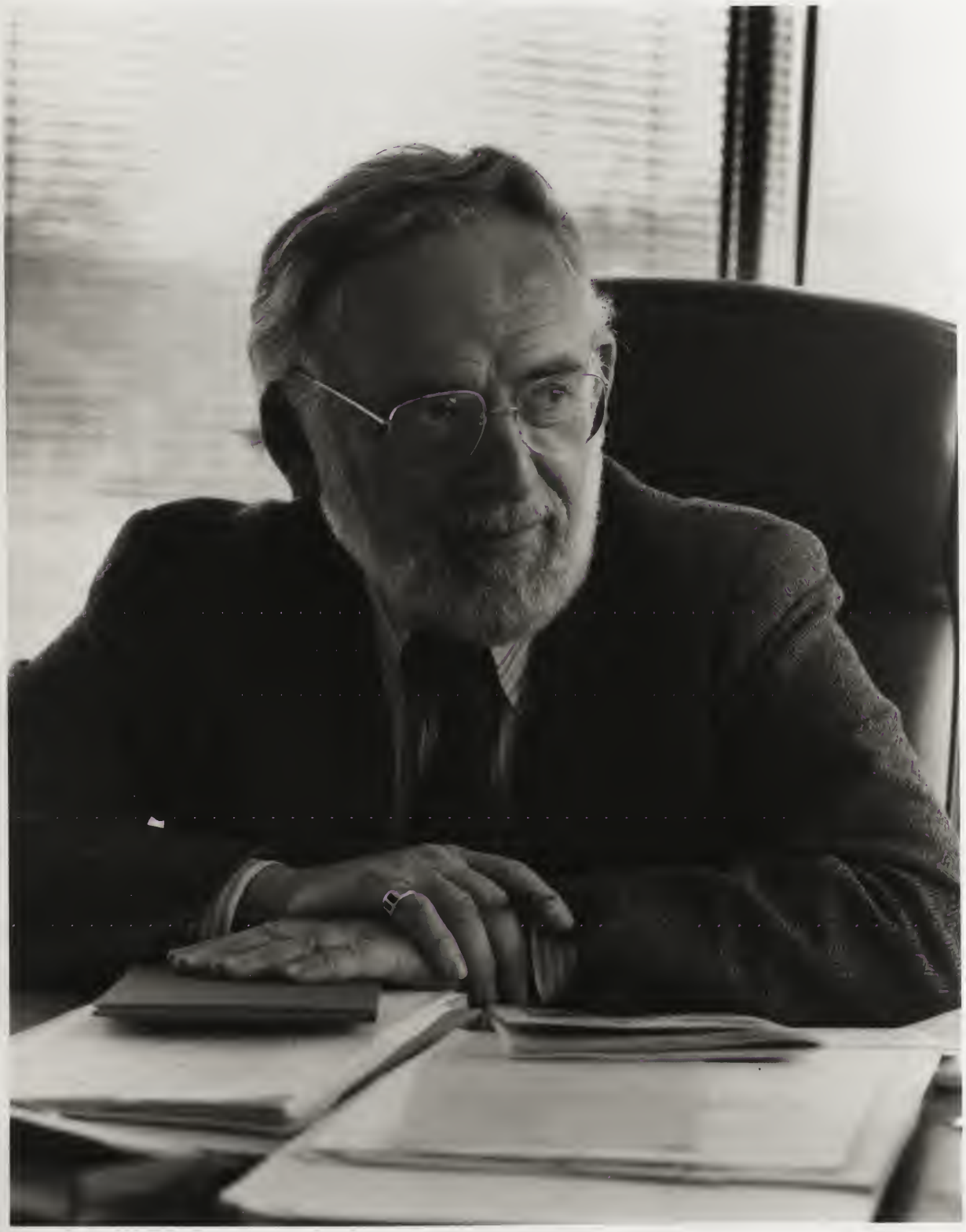

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RESTRICTIONS ON THIS INTERVIEW

There are no special restrictions on the first two sessions of this interview, which are included in this transcript. The final two sessions of the interview, conducted on 6 November, 1994, and 7 January, 1996, are included in a separate volume, which is sealed from public use until 1 April, 2001.

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Frontispiece: J. M. Edelstein, National Gallery of Art, circa 1985. Photograph courtesy of Eleanor Edelstein.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

J. M. Edelstein [August 10, 1925– June 12, 1996]
Married Eleanor Rockwell, 1951; two children

Education:

1942	High School graduation from Baltimore City College, Baltimore, Md. Classical course.
1942–43	Johns Hopkins U., Baltimore, Md. Military service April 1943–January 1946.
1945	U. of Florence, Florence, Italy. Italian history and literature.
1946-47	Johns Hopkins U. Majored in history. A.B.*cum laude*, Phi Beta Kappa.
1947-49	Johns Hopkins U. Graduate studies, Italian history and literature, minor in English.
1949–50	U. of Florence. Graduate studies in Italian history and literature. Fellowship from Fulbright Commission and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Italian Government.
1952–53	U. of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI. Master of Arts in Library Science.

Professional Career:

1953–54	Internship Program, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
1955–62	Reference Librarian and Supervisor of the Reading Room of the Rare Book Division of the Library of Congress.
1962–64	Bibliographer for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in the library of the U. of California, Los Angeles, California.
1964–66	Librarian for Special Collections at New York U., New York, N. Y.
1966–72	Humanities Bibliographer in the University Research Library and Lecturer in Bibliography in the School of Library Services of the U. of California, Los Angeles, California.
1972–86	Chief Librarian, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
1986–95	Senior Bibliographer and Resource Coordinator, Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, Santa Monica, California [now the Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, Los Angeles, California].
1995–96	Consultant, Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, and Brown U.

Professional Memberships:

1963	Board of Judges, Western Book Exhibition.
1970–71	Advisory Committee to the Rare Book Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries, American Library Association.
1968–72	Scholarship and Fellowship Committee of the U. of California, Los Angeles, School of Library Service.
1969–72	Committee on Research and Publications of the U. of California, Los Angeles, School of Library Service.
1970–72	U. California, Los Angeles, Council of Phi Beta Kappa, Eta Chapter of California.
1970–72	Committee on Public Lectures of the U. of California at Los Angeles.
1973–77	Folger Shakespeare Library British Studies Fellowship Selection Committee.
1974–96	Advisory Board, *First Printings of American Authors*.
1978	Elected a member, American Antiquarian Society.
1980–96	Board of Advisors, Beyond Baroque Foundation, Venice, California.
1983–96	Board of Directors, Center for Book Arts, New York, N.Y.
1988–96	Board of Advisors, Franklin Furnace, New York, N.Y.

Honors, Awards and Fellowships:

1942–43	Two-year scholarship from Baltimore City College for study at Johns Hopkins U.
1947	Phi Beta Kappa, Johns Hopkins U.
1946–49	Teaching Fellowship, Johns Hopkins U.
1949–50	Fellowship from Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Italian Government for a year's study at Florence U.
1949–50	Travel grant from Fulbright Commission for a year's study at the U. Florence.
1983	Travel and study grant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy and the National Gallery of Art to pursue Vespasiano da Bisticci studies in the archives and libraries of Florence, Italy.
1985	Travel and resident fellowship from Herzog August Bibliothek. Wolfenbüttel, Germany, to pursue Vespasiano da Bisticci studies.
1986–87	John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation fellowship award to do a history and bibliography of the Cummington Press and Abattoir Editions.

Publications (Partial):

"The Ordinal of 1793," *The Library of Congress Quarterly Journal of Current Acquisitions* 12, no. 4 (August 1955): 181–183.

"Some Early Editions of *The Consulate of the Sea,*" *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 15 (1957): 119–125.

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"A Lincoln Family Gathering," *The Library of Congress Quarterly Journal of Current Acquisitions* 18, no. 1 (November 1960): 1–4.

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"Rare Books in University Libraries," *Arts and Sciences* 64, no. 24 (June 1965): 8–11.

"American Book Publishing," *America Illustrated*, no. 9–80 (September 1965): 55–77.

Editor, *A Garland for Jake Zeitlin on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday and the Anniversary of His 40th Year in the Book Trade.* Los Angeles, Grant Dahlstrom and Saul Marks, 1967.

A Selected Catalog of Books From the Library of Don Cameron Allen. Mandeville Department of Special Collections, U. of California, San Diego, 1968.

"On Disposal of Duplicates," *The 1968 AB Bookman's Yearbook*, 1968, Part II, pp.

6–7.

"Kate's Writings: A Selected Bibliography," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 44, no. 5 (January 1970): 529–534.

"The Poet as Reader: Wallace Stevens and His Books," *The Book Collector* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1974): 53–68.

Wallace Stevens: A Descriptive Bibliography. Pittsburgh: U. of Pittsburgh Press, 1974.

"Petrarch: Honored as Europe's First Truly Modern Man," *Smithsonian* 5, no. 1 (April 1974): 48–55.

"The Bibliographical Society of America, 1904–1979," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 73, no. 4 (1979): 389–422.

Compiled *A Jargon Society Checklist 1951–1979.* Pamphlet to mark a Jargon exhibition at Books & Co., 939 Madison Avenue, New York City, March 15–April 14, 1979.

"Looking Across at Silvretta," *Conjunctions: I, A Festschrift in Honor of James Laughlin* (Winter 1981–82): 103–104.

"The Library and the Museum," *Immagine del Museo negli Anni '80*, Supplemento I to *Bolletino d'Arte*, Rome (1982): 24–27.

"Claude Fredericks and the Banyan Press: A Bibliographical Checklist," *American Book Collector* 7, no. 3 (March 1986): 30–37.

SESSION ONE: 4 NOVEMBER, 1994

[Tape I, Side One]

SMITH: The question we always start off with is, where and when were you born?

EDELSTEIN: I was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in the Christchurch Infirmary, on Broadway, which no longer exists. I was born on July 31, 1924, which, as my mother and the rest of the family constantly reminded me, was the hottest day that there ever had been. The hospital was a wonderful Victorian building, which I remember from my childhood.

SMITH: Could you tell me a little bit about your parents?

EDELSTEIN: My parents were Joseph and Irene. My mother's maiden name was Schwartz. She lived in Baltimore with her family, and my father was from New York. I can't remember the story, whether or not she went to New York and they met there, or he came to Baltimore. I think, if I remember correctly, something brought him to Baltimore . . . friends or sightseeing. Probably mutual friends, something like that. They married slightly more than a year before I was born, and my father took root in Baltimore.

SMITH: What kind of work did he do?

EDELSTEIN: He did all sorts of things. He sold real estate, insurance, and he had a sort of general store. He wasn't a man of enormous education, and he most often worked for himself. There were times when he worked for other people, but he

preferred working for himself. He had a grocery store at one time, then he had a dry goods store. The time that I particularly remember was when he sold real estate. My father did any number of things, and life was up and down, good and bad. I'm talking in economic terms; we were essentially a poor family. I'm a Depression person. I was born in 1924, as I told you, and when my sister [Nadine] came along in 1929 the joke was always in the family that she triggered the big stock market fall and the Depression. It was a joke that she never appreciated, even to this day. We lived through some rough times, but also some very good times.

My father was a wonderful man. He was a very gentle, very sweet kind of person, really the essence of goodness. He took his worldly fates very hard, but he was always good natured. I think I can count on one hand, if my memory serves me, the times when he was not good natured. He always saw the bright side of things, a real optimist. He died when he was eighty-nine, and outlived my mother by ten years. Those ten years were unhappy for him because he and my mother were extremely close. All married couples are close, but it was a very observable thing with them, and her death was a long and painful one.

If my father always saw the glass half full, my mother always saw it half empty. She was much more moody, and she was much better educated. Before they met she had been a secretary, and I think a doctor's assistant. Of the two, she certainly had more intellectual pretensions. My father had all the right instincts, but

he didn't have the education. My mother's personality wasn't as outgoing as my father's, but they made a good combination. There were some really very serious downs during their life together. [My father] wasn't cut off from his family, but there was that distance, and people didn't travel back and forth as much as they do today. So my sister and I, in our growing up period, never really knew my father's family. My mother's family was right there, and we knew more than we wanted to know about them. They had a lot of influence on us. But it has only been in relatively recent years that I have a feeling of family with my father's [relatives] and that's because as one gets older you realize how important those things are. My wife [Eleanor Rockwell Edelstein] and I have made a considerable effort in that respect.

My grandfather [Nathan Schwartz] and grandmother [Sarah Schwartz] were as much formative influences on my life as my mother and father—more so I think than in many families. My mother and her whole family were very close. It really was a different time; it could have been the model of the extended family that we talk about today. We practically lived in my grandfather and grandmother's house. I actually did live with them for a long time. My sister is five years younger than I, and during the early part of her life she was seriously sick and had to be hospitalized for long periods. There's a form of diabetes that affects only children, and she had that, plus all kinds of other awful things, the names of which I don't remember, if I ever did know them. There was one period when I was about six or seven, the time when kids

first go to school, in which my sister spent nearly a year in the hospital. There was a photograph in the *Baltimore Sun* of my mother and my sister in the hospital. I guess people thought she might not live, or she'd be an invalid or something, but as fate has it, for a woman who is sixty-five now, she is relatively healthy. She came out of all that with the passing of childhood. When my mother moved into the hospital with her, there I was with my father, and he had a business to run. At various times, and this was one of them, we were sort of living over the store. Times were hard in the early thirties. It was difficult for my father to take care of me and he didn't have money to hire somebody, so I went to live with my grandfather and grandmother, which pleased me enormously. I lived with them that whole year. I remember the year very well, because they too lived over a store.

My grandfather and grandmother were very interesting people—this was my mother's father and mother, you understand. My grandmother was I guess the prototype of a certain East European Jewish woman of the time. Both she and my grandfather had come from the part of Europe known to Jews as the Pale, that area between Poland and Russia which constantly was shifting back and forth. In one generation it was Poland and another generation it was Russia. They came of course in that wave of immigration before the First World War, around the turn of the century, when there was such a large immigration of not only Jews but all sorts of people.

After a very difficult life of pogroms and oppression and poverty, my grandmother was very, very strong. She really kept the family together. She was very energetic. She could do everything from cooking fantastic meals to running a store to arranging any imaginable need of life you could think of. She was very religious in the strict sense of the word, by which I mean observant of rules and formulas and that sort of thing. I suspect that my grandmother was illiterate, but she knew the first five books of the Bible by heart. She knew the entire prayer book by heart—all of the prayers and blessings for various ceremonial occasions. Not only that, she knew how to point them out in the prayer book, you see; she had that much understanding of it. For her, as for many other peoples who feel this way also, the prayer book was a very holy thing. If you dropped it on the floor you were committing a sin, and you had to atone for it, and there was a special prayer to say when you picked the book up from the floor.

So, there she was, a very warm, strong, and motherly grandmother, and a very important influence in my life. My head is filled with fairy tales and family stories, made-up stories, ghost stories, all kinds of things. She was very suspicious of course and quite ignorant of the ways of the world, but full of this rich lore that had been passed down to her in the same way. She was very outgoing; the house was always filled with people. Both my grandmother and my grandfather were very well liked and well thought-of in the community.

Now, my grandfather was a very different sort. He too was a very warm and welcoming individual, but he was a little more stand-offish than my grandmother. He was the supposed intellectual of that household, and he could read, there's no question about that because that's all he did. They had a corner store [where they] sold practically everything. In those days cigarettes were sold by the piece; somebody could come in and buy one cigarette. I think you could get a cigarette for two cents, or two cigarettes for one cent. As a little boy it was my job at one time to stand behind the counter and dispense these things, but I don't remember that in detail. There was an ice chest . . . everything went into it, because the workmen of the area would come in, and my grandmother would have sandwiches [for them], and that sort of thing.

SMITH: What area of Baltimore was this?

EDELSTEIN: This was in east Baltimore, on the corner of Lloyd and Central Avenue. Now if you go to Baltimore that area looks like a slum. It wasn't much more than a slum in the 1920s and 1930s when I knew it very, very well. But it was a sort of double ghetto. It was the heart of the immigrant Jewish world in Baltimore, and it was also a very active commercial area. My grandfather and grandmother's place was on the corner. If you had wanted to put something in the center of things you couldn't have chosen a better spot. It must have been a shack, although it was wonderful to me in my childhood.

So much was happening there all the time. At one end, as you looked down Lloyd Street, were mostly Jewish shops, with a sprinkling of Italian—the butcher and the baker and a paint shop, a hardware store, a dry goods store, and one thing or another. Lloyd Street was lively, it was wonderful. A block away, at the end of Lloyd Street and around the corner, were the two principal synagogues for that group of Jewish immigrants. There were the older groups that had come to the United States from other parts of Europe, principally Germany, a couple of decades earlier, who had already reached a different plateau and in many ways actually looked down at this new group. But in any case, everything that you wanted was right there.

Around the corner in the other direction, up Central Avenue, was a public library, which in some ways was the beginning of it all. I have a wonderful photograph of my father and me. He's very elegant; he's wearing a gray homburg. He always was a very elegant man. Until his late years when he couldn't take care of himself, I never saw my father unshaven or without his moustache and without a tie; he was always "picked up," as they say. [In this photograph] he has his homburg on, and a suit, and I'm standing with him holding me on top of the hedge, because I was a very little boy, and I'm also all dressed up. I don't know when I first went into the library, but I knew it was important; it meant something to me.

There was a street that ran parallel to Lloyd Street, where there was a lumberyard. We took that street to go up to the synagogue, and that lumberyard was

the most marvelous place to go by because it smelled so good. You could smell the wood being sawed and taken apart, and the big trucks would come with these huge tree limbs and tree trunks, and it was deep; it went way, way back. Occasionally, if the workmen were in a good mood, they'd let you come in and pick up marvelous pieces of wood, little pieces that had been sawed off, and the smell of that sawdust was just heaven. I can smell it as we talk now!

But then facing my grandfather and grandmother's shack and the store were railroad tracks, because on the far side of Central Avenue was the coal yard, and a coal car could come down and unload and reload. Next door to the coal yard was a scrap metal place. It sounds terrible, and it probably was terrible, but to a child it was absolutely heaven and there was always something to watch. Central Avenue was wide—you can still see that even today. I don't know if the tracks are still there or not, but it was wide, and there was a crane, and on the end of the crane was a huge round magnet. I don't know what the process was, but it could be magnetized or de-magnetized, so that the crane would lift up these various pieces of metal—parts of cars and all this marvelous, shiny stuff. Then the crane would move and it would drop down, and this was an enormously heavy, big thing, sort of cup-like. It took on a personality of its own, this object. So there was the coal yard, and the scrap metal crane and the train moving back and forth all the time.

I didn't have any curiosity or interest in the people who [oversaw these

activities]—I didn't think they were interesting. But the workmen were black men, and they were the customers of my grandfather and grandmother's shop. They would come in and [order] sandwiches, and the sandwiches were absolutely awful. I remember the first time I tried one. One of the most popular choices was a cheese sandwich. The bread was supplied by a baker, and it was not very good bread, it seemed to me. It may very well have been stale. But the slices were very thick. [My grandmother] would slice two huge pieces of bread, put them down, and put an enormous slice of rat cheese between them—you know, the yellow stuff. We called it rat cheese and I don't know what it's called today. I'm sure there's some fancy name for it now.

Well, I used to look at these sandwiches with [longing]. I just had to have one. For a long, long time I wasn't allowed to have one. They may not have been kosher, or they may just not have been considered proper food for a child, or whatever. But finally I got around to having one, and I don't know how that came about. I may just have sneaked in and made one for myself, but I can remember to this day the disappointment, because it was uneatable. There was mustard, but it wasn't very good; it came out of this huge jar. The bread was dry, the cheese was dry, and I thought it was awful. I couldn't understand it; these men would eat it with such gusto. They would have a sandwich and a drink. One of my jobs then was to get drinks out of these huge red or multicolored things with ice in them. The ice man

naturally would always come very early in the morning with his leather apron, to put the ice in. It was my job to store the soda bottles and take them out, and taking them out was always the worst part, especially as the day grew long, because you had to put your hand down in this very, very icy water. That was my job from time to time.

So [the men] would eat these awful sandwiches, and drinks, and then there was always pie. There was a separate little section of glass, or something resembling glass, and there were these awful pies—huge, triangular pieces of pie. They didn't eat the pie with a knife and fork. They would carry all [the food] and they'd sit around the place or go outside if the weather was good. [I remember] their talk, their patois, and their songs. There was a lot of music, and sometimes you couldn't tell when talk would stop and singing would begin. They were very rough I'm sure, but I never felt any [fear]. I didn't know then that I was observing an interesting culture. I don't think the word "culture" was used in that sense in those times, but of course I was, and I'm very happy about that now.

I think it's been observed many times that as you get older the memories of things that happened to you or that you observed when you were young seem to become clearer. In my case it's willful; I actually *try* to remember these things, and some of this may have to do with being married to a cultural anthropologist. Life there was really quite unusual, first of all because I wasn't with my father and mother. I'm sure I was spoiled rotten; I was really the jewel, the light in their eyes, and I could

do no wrong. I think they did all the right things by me. One thing they did not do right, according to the law, was send me to school.

SMITH: You didn't go to school?

EDELSTEIN: I went to school, but late. And they sent me to Hebrew school, not public school.

SMITH: Well, that's school.

EDELSTEIN: Yes, but I wasn't getting an education according to the requirements of the law. I've repeated this story so many times, but it helps to clarify these things, as you know. In order to get down to the cellar, you had to go outside. There were these wooden doors that opened wide, and then you would go down the stairs into this dirt cellar, which was wonderful. I loved to go down there because my grandfather had barrels of pickles, and pickled tomatoes, and jars of all sorts of wonderful stuff; it was full of secrets. Even when the cellar doors were closed, it was marvelous, because they were wooden doors and they were on a slant, and the sidewalk was wide, and I could play on those wooden doors. I'd sit on them and read, I'd sit on them and play with my blocks or toys, or just sit on them and watch the scene, you know—that was my territory.

One day I was sitting out there, playing or doing something on the cellar doors, and a lady came along and said, "Hello, little boy, what's your name?" and so on, and, "Where do you go to school?" Well, she marched into the place and had this

talk [with my grandparents], and the next day, or whenever, I was enrolled in the proper school. But actually there was some give and take about this, because I went into one school and then out of the school and then a compromise was made. I was sent to one school where in the morning I was taught in English, with proper curriculum for first grade or second grade or whatever this was—reading, writing, and arithmetic, which were rigorously taught in those days I am happy to say, and then in the afternoon there were Hebrew studies, religious studies.

SMITH: In the public school?

EDELSTEIN: No, in the same school; it was not a public school. I can't remember the sequence, but I did that for a year or more. All this happened during the year that I was living with my grandfather and grandmother. I went to a public school throughout my elementary and secondary education, but until quite late in my life I continued to go to the Hebrew school. I think I stopped going to the Hebrew school when I was about sixteen or maybe even seventeen, I can't remember.

SMITH: Were you learning modern Hebrew?

EDELSTEIN: I was learning ancient and modern Hebrew, both. Unfortunately I didn't apply myself to modern Hebrew as much as I would have liked. Mostly it was the study of the Hebrew texts, the commentaries on the Bible, of which there are many—ancient ones and medieval, and late medieval, and eighteenth century and so on. Then I spent a lot of time studying what was described as Jewish history, but they

were courses in European history. I've been very fortunate throughout my life in the teachers that I've had. In that school there was a man named Olitsky—I can't think of his first name—who was a brilliant historian. This was in my early teens. He left the Baltimore City College, which is where I went, to become professor of history at Dropsie College in Philadelphia, which is a great center of learning, devoted particularly to Hebraic studies. But then I studied a lot of history, language, biblical studies, religious studies, and just general historical studies, and at the same time the general curriculum was going on. The other day, one of those "game show questions" came up and somebody asked me what were the principal influences in my life. I didn't think very hard about it because it seemed so obvious. I could easily say they were my family, my teachers, and libraries.

SMITH: You say your family was quite observant then. Were your grandparents?

EDELSTEIN: Well, that's a very good question, because my mother and father, since they were not rebellious types, paid lip service to what they felt they had to do, particularly out of respect to their parents—my mother's parents in this particular case, since we didn't see much of my father's. His father had died when he was very young anyway; I never knew my grandfather on my father's side.

[Tape I, Side Two]

EDELSTEIN: My grandmother on my father's side died just about the time I was born, or when I was very young. My father did not come from an observant household. Actually, in some ways, he came from a more worldly household than my mother, although she was better educated, or pretended to be. My father was devoted to his in-laws, I mean truly devoted to them, which he proved over and over again when there were troubled times, and when they needed care as they got older. Particularly my grandmother, because my grandfather died when I was fourteen. My grandmother lived on to quite an advanced age, and my father—not her daughter, but my father—was the one who took care of her.

In any case, they were observant sometimes and sometimes not. I don't think they thought very much about the question. That they were Jews, there was no question; they knew they were Jews, and I suppose they believed in God, but we never talked about those things at all.

SMITH: Was your family Zionist?

EDELSTEIN: Yes, yes, and that actually played a large part in my young life. Now let me interrupt because I'd like to come back to that. My grandfather and grandmother *were* observant. My grandmother was a zealot; it was almost too much. But for her everything was rote. Just as I suspect that she couldn't really read, so I suspect that her observance was . . . well, this is just the way it's done. When the time

comes to light the candles on Friday night that's what you do, and I didn't get from her or any of them any ideas about meaning. I had no idea what "spiritual" meant. I got fantastic lore, history, stories, wonderful rich stuff, but it was all rote; it was what you do, what we are, this is the kind of society we belong to. Nobody ever told me why you had to stand up when you said a certain prayer. Why couldn't you just sit down? Nobody ever explained that, or if they did explain, it was in terms that I'd never really understood. I got many more answers in school. They were not answers that I was satisfied with, but they were answers.

SMITH: In Hebrew school?

EDELSTEIN: In Hebrew school, yes. But even there there was a contradiction, because this man that I mentioned, Olitsky, was not an observant Jew. He was a Jew, but he was not observant. He was probably agnostic. I can't say that for sure, and I may be giving you an entirely wrong impression, but the history that we learned with him was social, cultural history of a certain group of people, and there was no relation to anything religious or spiritual involved. I've thought about this quite a lot because—and this must be true of a lot of people of my generation— on one hand so much of my life was infused with religious observance and ritual objects—books, the synagogue, the schedules, the dietary laws—but then there was also this other big world out there, this changing America, particularly in the years when I was growing up, and the attractions of other things, with very little overt relationship between the

two. And there was not very much, if any, relationship between these things that we had to observe, and *meaning.*

You never shake this off; it's always part of you. Those lessons you're taught or the observations that you make, the stories that you're told when you're young, become part of you. They're just there. You may stuff them down somewhere at the bottom of your mental, emotional and whatnot chest-of-drawers, but they are there. Sometimes you just forget them and sometimes you just accept them and sometimes they rise up or you bring them out and you play with them, and you go along with what may be a social demand or a cultural demand, and other times you make them a part of your life in the sense that you try to understand them and relate them to other things. I don't know, it's quite complex.

I am not observant, but I'm what other people have called a secular Jew. There's no question that I'm Jewish; that's me, that's a part of my life, and there are times when I actually find a great deal of pleasure and even emotional satisfaction in going to a synagogue. Not often, I have to say, because I am not terribly sympathetic with ritual for ritual's sake. But every now and then something occurs that's out of my control, and very often it will be a melody. Music plays a very large part in my life, purely as an absorber of it; I don't play any instrument anymore, but I listen to music all the time. Sometimes I'll hear a melody, and there's nothing stronger than that. Or I'll hear a recitation of a prayer or a blessing and it will touch the right

button, and I'm actually suffused with a feeling of something outside of me. Mostly though, it's a feeling of connection; it's a connection with my past, it's a connection with history, with all those people that have come before me. It's not a religious matter. I still am curious, and I still would like to know what people do when they pray to God. I have no real understanding of that. You know, in bad times I think I've actually said, "Whoever you are, come on, break down and help me, give me a break." But that's the kind of thing you do when you are really at wit's end, when things are bad.

Here we sit, and you can see from the window that really very handsome church, and very often I've watched people going in, as I've gone into many, many churches. I think I've visited as many cathedrals all over the world as most people who've done the kind of traveling and work that I do have visited, but every now and then I wonder, "Well now, what is it? How do they do this, and what is the connection that they're making?" And I don't really get it. I think that I've probably missed something very important. I've spent so much time with the material, intellectual, spiritual *things* that religion has produced—everything from great architecture, to music, to paintings—and I can appreciate those things up to the point where I can make a bridge to the religious, spiritual spark that produced it. All these things that have been done for the glory of God have been vital aspects of my life, but the *meaning* of God is something that I still wonder about. I said this once to a man

who was an Episcopalian priest, and he said to me, "You're working too hard at it. You've got the answer; it's that wonder itself which is the prime mover. Don't belabor it so." So I said, "I'd be happy to accept that answer if I didn't know about the miles and miles of shelves of philosophical and religious tracts that exist, a tiny thimbleful of which I've dipped into, which try to explain that wonder. He couldn't tell me to just accept it like that when I knew about this long history of people who expressed the wonder but then realized that the mind wasn't satisfied that way. I don't know. It is a question that I think about often.

So back to the family, and were they observant: Now I've told you about my grandmother, I've told you about my father and mother, who sort of followed the forms, but when it wasn't convenient, or if somebody wasn't watching, they didn't. They did what they thought was necessary for me and my sister and themselves. On the Jewish high holidays it would have been unimaginable to keep the store open, but that's true even today for a lot of people who in no other way express their religion. Is that a matter of faith? I don't know, I think it's just a matter of practice, of habit; it's a cultural phenomenon. So that's my mother and father, and they never pushed me in that direction.

SMITH: What were your family's ambitions for you?

EDELSTEIN: Can I just say one more thing about religion and then I'll come back to that?

SMITH: Oh, certainly.

EDELSTEIN: I mentioned my grandmother, who was religious in a conventional sense; she observed everything. I think if she had any ambition it was to find out that there was an observance that she hadn't previously known about so she could take it up. For a young person, especially one getting into adolescence, this could be a little bit of a problem, but she was such a marvelous woman and she was so loving and so warm and giving that that was a minor thing. Now my grandfather was the interesting one, because he was observant but I suspect that there was a little bit of cynicism in his makeup. Here he was, a poor man, running this corner store—chewing gum and cigarettes and an odd sandwich, a cold bottle . . . pennies. But he was the pillar of the synagogue, as it were. He was always dressed in a black suit and a derby hat, and the members of the congregation would come around and sit around my grandmother's table and talk long into the night: politics, social questions, religious questions, questions about the synagogue.

My grandfather was always at the head of the table, and he was observant. He smoked like a fiend, he had a beard, he was very handsome. His beard was not long, it was trimmed, rounded, but it was filthy because it was streaked with tobacco stains, and his teeth were falling out because they were rotted with tobacco. Of course children would be fascinated with these yellow, horrible ugly streaks of tobacco that stained his beard. He didn't smoke on the Sabbath. But he had a different side of his

life, and it was the side which was extraordinarily influential on me. He was a sort of amateur historian. He believed that it was not right to live in a place if you didn't know about it. We had a ritual for a long time during my childhood. Every Saturday afternoon, after going to the synagogue, we would have a walk. Not *just* a walk; it was a real hike, because he would walk everywhere through this part of the city.

This section of Baltimore was not only a rich, vibrant Jewish, Italian, and black ghetto, where all these lives impinged on one another, plus the lumber yard and the coal yard and all that, but we were also walking distance from the harbor. I don't know if you know Baltimore, but in those days there was a real harbor. There is this inner harbor now, which is just another theme park like so much of American cities have become today, with the same shops that you see everywhere, the same boutiques, the same food and all of that, but when I was a boy that harbor was a dream. It came, as the inner harbor still does, right smack up into the center of the city, a block from the city hall. Big boats came up from the Caribbean with fruit, bananas and watermelons, and there were the stevedores with their wonderful litanies and cries. You know, those marvelous cries have been collected; there's a lot of literature about it. There were boats filled with oysters and crabs, which of course were forbidden to us, but they were so colorful.

My grandfather always had his walking stick. He had a whole array of these walking sticks. He was very elegant too, like my father. They had a lot in common in

that way, although my grandfather certainly had a disreputable look because there was always cigarette ash on his beard; his beard was covered with it. But he was always spiffed up in the sense that he had a proper suit on and he had this black derby and these wax stiff collars, high ones. I never saw my father or my grandfather without their shoes absolutely sparkling. So we'd walk, and my grandfather would light his cigarette and say, "Okay, now, who lived in that house?" And then I'd have to remember: "Well, that was where Francis Scott Key lived." And then, "Who lived in that house?" And I would say, "That was where [Edgar] Allan Poe was born." All of the Poe family lived in that neighborhood. My grandfather knew every house, and he knew everybody, and as we walked people would greet him. Then we'd get along the harbor, and there was the McCormick Tea and Spice Company, which still exists; it's very big, and they still distribute tea and spice, although they've probably been taken over by A & P or who knows what today. But that entire area always smelled of spices, and the boats would come up and unload, and it was just absolutely heaven. My grandfather knew all of these people, and they all knew me. It was a fantastic education, absolutely fantastic.

So my grandfather sort of straggled two worlds. He would do some of his share in the store, but he left it, really, all to my grandmother. She did everything; she ran the house, she ran the store. My grandfather would fall back on what had been the traditional role of the Jewish scholar. The holy thing to do was to be a scholar, to

study the Torah, because it's in the Torah that all the lessons of life and the laws that are to be obeyed are contained. It is through the study of Torah that the good Jew achieves his fulfillment and obeys God's command. So that's supposedly what he was doing. But he was really dreaming his dreams, and pretending, and talking. People were coming around, and there was a lot of talk. If it wasn't these black guys coming down covered with coal dust and sawdust, there were his compatriots talking about what was happening in Palestine then, or in Europe, in Germany, or in the States—what Roosevelt was going to do next—or talking about religious questions.

My grandfather was very stern with me. I was very highly disciplined, and we were very close. That first year, when I actually lived there, I slept in the same bed with him, but it wasn't very comfortable. He probably was just as uncomfortable as I was. I don't know how long that lasted, but I have a memory of a big feather bed and my grandfather, but then finally I got my own bed. The rooms above the store were not heated, so I think maybe I slept with my grandfather for warmth. I think that's very likely. The toilet was outside, so it was hard, but I don't have a memory or a feeling of deprivation, because there was so much activity and so much warmth of another kind. There were all these men, and a constant stream of people talking.

I haven't forgotten your question. You wanted to know about their expectations for me and you wanted to know about Zionism. It's sort of interrelated, because the talk always continued in my mother and father's household. My father

was not a great talker but my mother was, and I guess she sort of continued what had been a lifestyle that she had learned in her father and mother's house. There was always somebody in the kitchen, in back of the store or above the store, as it happened to be, and my mother was a wonderful cook. She never ate but she cooked. [laughter] The number of times that my mother sat down at the table, in my memory, were very, very few. If she sat down at the table to take part in the meal that she had made, she was always jumping up and down constantly. The table and the stove were adjacent; there was no such thing as a dining room—not in our house, anyway.

Even in the worst of times there were people coming in. My grandparents and my parents were embodiments of charity. There was always something for somebody who needed it. And these were, believe me, really very bad times. You've heard this before from many people, I'm sure. There were always people who were there for a meal. Of course there were occasions when it was just the family, but it seemed like at every meal—breakfast, lunch, and dinner—there was always a stranger or a relative, or somebody from the old country, or somebody passing through, at the table. And with that there was talk.

On Sunday afternoons we went to the house of our cousins, Etta and David Fishman. Etta was my mother's first cousin, the daughter of my grandmother's sister. My family and these people were very close, and they were a very important influence

on me. I think about them all the time. There were other families that were part of this circle, but these people were the closest. They were the center of the circle. They were extremely interesting. They left Europe, but instead of coming directly to America they went to Palestine. I should say, just in passing, although it's not a passing subject, that my mother's family was very severely affected by what in short terminology we call the Holocaust. They lost lots of people to concentration camps and one kind of massacre or another. Both my father and mother were born in Europe. My father was born in Odessa, and my mother in this tiny village of Mlniv, in that shifting boundary land between Russia and Poland. Dave Fishman and one of my grandmother's brothers went to Palestine, and then they came to America. In Palestine they lived on a kibbutz. It was a hard, pioneering, rough and at the same time very romantic life. But they also acquired a highly intellectual life.

We went to the Fishman's house *every* Sunday afternoon for years. There were times when I was quite rebellious about this; I wanted to do other things, or I wanted to be alone or whatever. But no, it was a family thing, and we went. I spent so much time in that house that sometimes I didn't know where I belonged. We'd sit around their kitchen, and sometimes I was bored stiff. Sometimes I didn't understand it, and even if I did understand it I was bored. But I know now how wide-ranging, and occasionally deep and rich this talk was, about everything under the sun. Mostly it was politics. By politics I mean true politics, and the social and economic situation

in Europe. Dave and Etta Fishman, particularly Dave, were much better educated, in the strict sense of the word—they had more schooling—than my mother and father, and they were readers to a greater extent than my mother and father. Dave had a menial job in a bakery in Baltimore. He did this type of work all his life, but out of choice, because that left him time to do other things. He didn't have to worry about keeping the store open and all these other things. People were always after him to do something else, because it was sort of a low-class job, but it was fine with him. They had two daughters.

Dave moonlighted as a Hebrew teacher, and it was with him that I supposedly was studying modern Hebrew, because having spent years in Palestine, he spoke and read Hebrew very well. Every now and then there would be some visitor from Palestine—it was not Israel until 1948—and the discussion would be in Hebrew. But most of the discussions of course were in English, or an extraordinary combination. I grew up speaking English and Yiddish in my grandfather's house. When we were in the house we spoke Yiddish, because that was my grandmother's language. When we were outside the house we spoke English, because half the time there was a third party—one of the passers-by, or boat owners or whatever—who we would be talking to. In my own home we spoke English, but when my mother and father were in my grandparent's house they spoke Yiddish.

My father, and it's something that I'm very happy to have inherited from him,

had a great gift for languages. Also, I think he just had that kind of ear; he was more a mimic than a linguist, and I'm probably more of a mimic than a linguist. But he was always interested in learning languages, and when he was something like eighty years old he started to study Russian, and he did very well. My mother had died and he lived with a group of people who were Russian. He felt that he couldn't communicate or understand, so he studied Russian, and when he died at eighty-nine he was speaking Russian very well.

So, back to the Fishmans and Zionism. I spent an awful long time in that house. I was perforce a Zionist. I think I was a Zionist even before I knew what it meant. I am less of a Zionist now, but I was a Zionist then because it was part of everything that was familiar. Dave Fishman was not your run-of-the-mill Zionist; he was an activist. I mean he was for shooting everybody that got in the way, and there were no actions that he considered reprehensible or even impossible. He would do whatever was necessary to establish this Jewish state. So this was part of my life; I didn't know that there was anything else. I think it accounts for very troubled feelings that I have about Israel and Israeli politics and the future, because one part of me understands and believes in the state of Israel and the need for it, and I know in factual terms how it came about and why it came about and so on. I not only absorbed it from the family, but I read an enormous body of literature till I was blue in the face. But there are other issues of course that I know about today and feel

strongly about today. I'm totally opposed to anything that has a violent component—everything from the death penalty to war.

[Tape II, Side One]

SMITH: Did your family think about emigrating to Palestine?

EDELSTEIN: No, no.

SMITH: Of course they were very concerned about what was going on in Germany. Were there efforts to get family out of there?

EDELSTEIN: Oh, yes. There was a lot of talk about that. Some were gotten out and some were not.

SMITH: I know from other people I've interviewed that in Germany, particularly amongst the men, there was even resistance to leaving.

EDELSTEIN: Yes, and then the war came and that was it. That's another big part of the story which we'll get to. But as for my family's expectations for me, that was very clear from the beginning. I think this was something which was pervasive in that culture and that society, and it's a story that has been told many, many times, over and over again. There was never any question in their mind, there was never any question in my mind; it was a settled thing. I was going to be what was referred to as a "professional man." That was it. Unlike some other people, it never was a problem for me, because that was my ambition too. Now, the fact that there were these parallel ambitions was good, I suppose, but maybe not so good. Maybe my life would

have been different, more adventurous, even more creative if I had been a more rebellious type and had chosen paths of my own rather than conforming to what we now know as quite a common pattern. Nevertheless, there was only one really important life and that was the scholarly life. Whether or not I was going to be a lawyer or a doctor or a professor or a this or a that never was the issue. Was I going to be one, or all of those things?—the more the better of course.

Not only was I the male child, but I was the oldest. My sister, as I said, came five years later. In addition to the fact that she was a girl, she was a sickly child, so she suffered because the family did not have the same ambitions for her. It was all laid on me; I was going to be this great figure—which was easy enough for them to foresee, because I was, from day one practically, the embodiment of just what they wanted. When was I happiest? I was happiest with a book in front of me, listening to music, going to a museum, observing nature, walking with my grandfather and talking about history, finding about who built what, when, and why. All of these things couldn't have delighted them more. I spent time in libraries, I spent time with my own books. I was perfect. And I was an obedient child, not a rebellious one. I'm sure I had my moments, but for the most part I was the answer to their prayers. So everything was done for me, and I probably was terribly, terribly spoiled. I didn't realize it then. I thought this was the way it ought to be. Everything was made as easy as possible for me. Some people would even have said that in some ways I was

neglected because so much was taken for granted. Here I was, a good child, a good boy, with my nose in a book. I didn't make trouble, so people left me alone instead of challenging me. I think there's something to this. Certainly later in life I think I would have developed differently if I had been encouraged to move out of this pattern, but I wasn't. I'm thinking particularly about when I was older, in my teens, and it was time to go to college. It never occurred to anybody that I would leave home.

SMITH: No?

EDELSTEIN: No. It was only later, when a lot of things had happened to me, that I thought about why I stayed there. I had top marks in high school and I had a full scholarship. I stayed in Baltimore and went to Johns Hopkins, where they treated me beautifully. I had fantastic experiences which I wouldn't have traded for the world, but I might have had fantastic experiences elsewhere too. You can't relive your life, but it's certainly not unnatural to wonder and ask these questions. At the time it never occurred to me. Interestingly enough, it never occurred to anybody else either. It certainly never occurred to my parents, but also, interestingly enough, it did not occur to the scores of bright, observant, and interested adults with whom I came in contact—my teachers and counselors, and so on. Very strange that nobody said, "Well, you've got this full scholarship to Johns Hopkins but with your grades you could go anywhere. Why don't you go to Harvard?" Nobody ever put it to me, and I

find that strange now.

So these were their ambitions. I was going to be a scholar or a professional person of some kind. I ran through the gamut of things I wanted to do. I met one of the great archaeologists of all time, William Foxwell Albright, who taught at Johns Hopkins, and he took kindly to me, an undergraduate—I think I was a freshman—so I was going to be an archaeologist. Everything from A to Z. If I met interesting teachers, and I met many who inspired me, I was lucky, I would decide to be whatever they were—a poet, a musician, or a doctor, and so on. This is an attitude, actually, that has not left me. Every now and then I make a joke, which now of course is a poor joke, that I'm going to do this or that when I grow up. I'd better hurry up.

SMITH: You were raised in a very rich culture, and then you went to the public schools. Was that an extension of your family life, or was there some conflict there, or difference?

EDELSTEIN: No conflict at all. There were private schools that I was aware of, but the kids who went to those schools came from a different class. I suppose if my family had wanted to pursue this I probably could have gotten some kind of scholarship—they didn't have enough money to send me—but I don't think it occurred to them. It didn't really have to occur to them, because, as I'm sure you know, the public schools that I went to were not the public schools of today. I went

to fantastic schools. In those days, everybody had the most marvelous education, and my mother was always interested and aware and watching what might happen. When I was in elementary school, I did something naughty, and the teacher had a ruler with a metal edge.

SMITH: Oh, a ferrule.

EDELSTEIN: She made you put your hand on the desk and she'd [strike your hand] with the metal edge, so your knuckles were cut and bleeding. I came home for lunch and my mother saw this. She marched back to the school with me and caused such a fuss. I remember that I was so proud of my mother and I was terrified of what would happen. The teacher disappeared, and I thought, "My mother did this!" The teacher was a horrible woman and what she did was really cruel, because my knuckles *were* bleeding. She'd take this ruler, and . . . swoosh!

So, as I said, there were the financial reasons for not sending me to a private school, but beyond that, it just didn't occur to them. One, I was studious, diligent, and motivated. I did well in school. And two, the school did very well by me.

SMITH: What languages did you take in high school?

EDELSTEIN: Lots. I studied French, German, Italian, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. And then there was Yiddish always in the background. We moved around quite a bit, because one business or another of my father's would fail. There was a time when we had to move in with one of the Fishmans—not Etta and Dave Fishman, but another

member of that family. We had to move in with them because I guess we couldn't keep up the house or something. Things were tumultuous in those years, but I never felt deprived, and I was never hungry. There was always, as I said, food enough for others. It was only when we lived in other people's houses that I was aware that there wasn't enough sometimes.

I remember one time being very, very disturbed and hurt. I was in tears. Things were bad, and we went to live with Etta Fishman's sister, Ida, and she made the most delicious green pea soup. She had served us at the table and I finished the bowl before anybody else had even begun. I asked for more, and it was right out of Dickens. [laughter] You know: "How could you ask that?" Well, I felt terrible, and obviously I remember it. I remember going to Etta Fishman's house and having lunch with their girls, Selma and Irene. I noticed when Mrs. Fishman gave me my sandwich she didn't put a whole piece of cheese or meat in it like my mother did; she would tear the meat or cheese up in little pieces so there would be enough to go around. Things like that made an impression on me, and I noticed that. But in my house there was always plenty for me and my sister, and there was always enough for other people. There was always somebody.

There was an uncle who had come for breakfast. I can recall watching this man; I never saw anybody eat so much. I guess maybe that was his only meal that day, I don't know. It was always breakfast. Then there was this terribly overweight

lady, who wasn't even a relative, but she came from the same village. There's a wonderful word for that, a *Landsmann*, a *Landsleid*, and she was part of the village, the shtetl. She always came for tea. She always had to have another glass of tea "to wash it down," because she was eating all this stuff. That was her phrase. It was the first time that I ever heard that phrase, and it has stuck with me. I thought she was sort of gross because she ate so much and she was fat to begin with. I didn't like her, but my mother did. My mother said, "She's hungry. She's a person." and she came from the village, and so on, and you have to feed people.

I don't know how we got on to that, but let me go back to my high school experience. I don't know any word for it other than . . . wonderful, inspiring. I went to what is known as the Baltimore City College, which still exists. It was founded in the early part of the nineteenth century, when there was this great movement in American public education. Boston Latin, which also still exists, was the first school to come out of this movement; it was really the equivalent of the *Gymnasium*. I can't remember now whether Baltimore City College was the second or third, but anyway, there was something magical about that school. I think, in many ways, in terms of consciousness, being aware of what was going on, my high school days were the most pleasurable. One of the reasons was that the school was far away from the dismal neighborhood in which I lived, above the store.

At that time we lived down on Washington Boulevard. Not much of it is left

now, what with freeways and highways and one thing or another. Martin Luther King Highway has bisected that area. But then it was at the edge of the city, in the business section. The kitchen was behind the store. Above were two rooms and a bathroom, and on the third floor were two rooms, one of which was a storage room, and the other was my bedroom. My sister had a bedroom on the second floor, my mother and father's bedroom was there, and the bathroom. I had a chamber pot in my room so that I wouldn't have to disturb my parents at night, because you had to go through their bedroom to get to the bathroom.

In order to get to Baltimore City College I had to get on a trolley, and then I had to transfer in a section which I loved, filled with marvelous late nineteenth century stone, marble and brick houses of the well-to-do and the upper classes. Cities, architecture, urban life have been and are very important to me. I thrive on these things, in some ways. So I transferred on Charles Street, just above Mount Vernon Place. At that point my life changed and I was a different person, because from there to Baltimore City College, which was like a gothic cathedral sitting on a high green hill, where all you saw were grass and flowers and bushes and plants and trees. In the distance you saw houses, and Eastern High School, the girls' school—Baltimore City College was just for boys—and then Babe Ruth Stadium, a marvelous ball park, which has been supplanted by the Camden Yard station. Baseball is a passion of mine, partly because I grew up where there was a *real* ball

park, with *real* grass. The games were only played in the day time, and the Baltimore Orioles were a marvelous team. It was Babe Ruth's city, where he was born. So Baltimore City College was a beautiful gothic building on this high hill, and it had wide halls and good study rooms and class rooms, a library that you could get lost in, a swimming pool, and clubs of all kinds to join: the history club, the Latin club, and a school newspaper. And the teachers knew something and loved their work. They could inspire the kids.

When I didn't go to school, I walked the city. On the weekends I walked from my house to the Lyric Theater, where there were musical and theatrical productions. The theater was opposite Mount Royal Station, another place that I loved. Now it's a museum devoted to trains and various other things. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad doesn't exist anymore. Then I'd walk all the way up to the Baltimore Museum of Art. I'd walk to the Walters Art Gallery, which is in Mount Vernon Place, and I'd walk to the Peabody Institute Library. Or I might just walk to Mount Vernon Place and sit on the stone benches, looking at the sculpture, the bronzes, and the marble. I'd go to Grace Episcopal Church because it had and still has one of the great organs in America. I wouldn't tell my mother and father about that because they would think that that was not right. I didn't tell my mother and father about most of these things. They didn't ask and I didn't tell them. I didn't think they'd understand and I was sort of growing away from them at that point. I thought all this was better than my life at

home. It was cleaner. All of these people looked more dignified, grander, richer; they had traditions. I had traditions of course, but they had better traditions.

Mostly I walked to the Enoch Pratt Free Library. It is my unshakable conviction that one of the glorious achievements of this country was the creation of the free public library. There are many people who have said the same thing. Alfred Kazin wrote a book about himself called *A Walker in the City*, and that's what I was. You know, all through life one sees and is aware of things that speak to you very strongly, and I never had and never will have Alfred Kazin's abilities as a thinker, as a critic, and certainly not as a writer, but I saw this book and realized that this book was as much about me as it was about him—everything from the title to the specific experiences. In those days the Enoch Pratt was one of the great libraries in America. It was across the street from the Baltimore cathedral, the Bullfinch building, with its wonderful, shiny dome. This was the old WASP territory of the city . . . marvelous shops and shop windows, and great houses. It was a different way of life, you know, where families as a whole sat down to eat. Mother wasn't always at the stove, and conversations were of a different sort.

It was a period of discovering oneself, but one might also say I was separating myself from my family and from my background. You know, it all comes back, you make a circle again, but I guess that's what one does in those years, in adolescence, and it's an everyday experience. My real life was as a walker in the city. I always

enjoyed walking to the Baltimore Museum of Art more than whatever I did inside the Baltimore Museum of Art. The experience of going to the museum was a more fulfilling one than what happened inside, although many great things happened inside that museum and other museums, and it was particularly true of the Walters Art Gallery. So the city, the school, and the libraries were really important. On top of everything that happened to me before, those were the really formative things.

SMITH: Were your closest friends in your community, or at the high school?

EDELSTEIN: At school. I had a couple of close friends in the community, but my life was really outside. There was a guy who lived next door whose father had a jewelry store. We did some things together, but he wasn't interested in the kinds of things I was interested in. There was another fellow who lived not far away whose father was also in business or something. Allen Oppenheimer was his name. We played tennis. In those days I played a lot of tennis. I was not terribly athletic. I think I was a kind of roly-poly type. I was never fat, but I was roly-poly—not an athletic sort. But I liked tennis and I was pretty good at it, actually. There were some public courts where you could play at night, so Allen and I used to do that, but I was really a loner. I used to go on these long, long walks. I'm talking about, well, six or seven miles each way. I'd go for walks in the country too, but not so much; it was the city that really interested me. Every now and then I'd go out into the country because where we lived, Washington Boulevard, was sort of the edge of the city.

Now it's much absorbed. I knew very little about country life. I'd explore the Patapsco River and wander around. It was dangerous. I used to be afraid because everybody would tell me about the stuff you sink into.

SMITH: Oh, quicksand?

EDELSTEIN: Quicksand. I doubt that it was truly quicksand, but it was obviously very marshy, and you could probably sink in to your knees or maybe even your waist, I don't know, but that always gave a little edge of excitement to it. And then there was, and there still is, a marvelous city park in Baltimore called Druid Hill Park. It's one of the great city parks. I'd walk to the harbor and relive the times that I went with my grandfather.

Around Mount Vernon Place there was the Walters, the Peabody, the Enoch Pratt, fantastic houses, and there was the Peabody Bookshop. The Peabody Bookshop was a real institution. A German guy came over, a German Jew, I suppose, although I never thought about it, and he opened up a bookshop one block above Mount Vernon Place. It was one of those secondhand bookshops that were so prevalent in America. There were lots of bookshops in Baltimore: Howard Street, Franklin Street, Charles Street. I didn't know anything about rare books and the antiquarian book trade and all of this stuff in those days. All I knew was there were books in these places and you could buy them for a nickel, or a quarter—although a quarter was a lot of money in those days. I always had a little bit of money in my

pocket. I got an allowance. I had had odd jobs, although I never really worked the way other kids worked. As I said, I think I was spoiled; much too much was given to me. I did from time to time have an odd job, but it wasn't really till I got to college that I worked.

The Peabody Bookshop was street level, and outside there were barrels of books. You'd go down a couple of steps, and there was a long room. Siegfried Weissberger would be sitting on a high stool behind a long table, smoking a big pipe, glasses, sort of grumpy. He had an upstairs which was so dirty; you had to snake your way through tons and tons of books. I don't think I ever found anything, but it was heaven, absolute heaven. But then, heaven plus, you went through the bookstore and behind it was a real German *Bierstube*. Now, Baltimore was a very German city. It still has a large German population, but that population is small now compared to the other ethnic groups that have moved in. In that *Bierstube* there was nothing but a wooden floor, wooden tables, wooden wall, and beer. Well, I was young, underage, but I knew that the literati and the intelligentsia from Johns Hopkins were there, and Henry [H. L.] Mencken would be there constantly; I saw him umpteen times. Everybody who was anybody I thought worth seeing was there. But I couldn't go in.

When I was about fourteen years old, around the corner from our store/house on Washington Boulevard was a branch library. May Carnegie's soul rest in peace; whatever else he was, he was a genius for his idea of building these libraries. Even as

much as I loved the main branch, which was one of the great libraries of the United States, I practically lived at this branch around the corner, and a lot of very important things happened to me there. There was a librarian, and her name was Mrs. Melvin. Of course I thought this was wonderful because my middle name is Melvin. My full name is Jerome Melvin.

[Tape II, Side Two]

SMITH: You were talking about the *Bierstube*.

EDELSTEIN: I was talking about the *Bierstube* and I was going to talk about Mrs. Melvin, because they're related. Well, I would hear about these fantastic conversations that were going on in the *Bierstube*, and all these people, and it was my ambition to live there. There was this library where I spent lots of time reading, or just dreaming. An awful lot of dreaming goes on in libraries, you know. People just sit, and I think it's wonderful. The librarian, Mrs. Melvin, was a small woman with dark hair. I have the sense of somebody sort of petite and pretty, who took an interest in me. I remember the first time that I was conscious of her as a person. I said something and she corrected my grammar. I was so embarrassed, so ashamed. I know that my face must have become beet red. She said something like, "You're a smart kid, you shouldn't say things like that." I don't remember what it was, but she corrected me. She must have done this with lots of kids. Whenever I walked in she'd ask me what I thought about the books I was returning and she would suggest that I

read something else. I guess I had a crush on her.

One day, she said, "My husband and I," or maybe it was, "My boyfriend and I are going to the Peabody Bookshop tonight. Will you ask your mother and father if it's okay if you can come with us?" In those days you said that to fourteen year olds. I was floating. I had permission, but I would have gone with them even without permission, probably. I would have lied about it, but I didn't have to. So I went. There was a piano in there, and this fat, bald-headed guy was plonking out these ersatz German songs, and people sang, if they'd had enough beer. It was a smoky, thick atmosphere. I was served a Coca-Cola ,or whatever was being served in those times to kids, and at one point Mrs Melvin said, "Would you like to have some beer?" I had had alcohol on religious ceremonial occasions. I had to sip wine, and I may have even sipped beer, because my father liked to have beer, but this was really my *first* beer, you know. This was at a table in the Peabody Bookshop, and it was different. I was just astonished. I thought at any minute the cops were going to come in and raid the place. Mrs Melvin said, "It's okay; it will be all right." Well, she was just the first of a whole array of people who somehow or another were in that path that I was taking. Librarians and teachers. There were librarians in the Enoch Pratt who were kind, thoughtful, observant, and generous. And they taught. They were the embodiment of Chaucer's teacher, the person who gladly learns and gladly teaches. It's as if they were just waiting there for this sponge-like kid to come up and

ask them a question.

But even better were the teachers, in the sense of it being their profession, in high school. There were three of them, in particular. One was the principal of Baltimore City College, who taught Latin. He was Mr. Chips in person. As it turned out, he actually looked like the movie version of Mr. Chips. He really did. He always wore a three-piece, gray, mottled wool suit. He was tall, well over six feet, thin, with white hair, and he had these round, rimless glasses, and really icy blue eyes, except that he was a warm person. When he looked at you, you wanted to come to attention; you knew that he was expecting the best. I've been trying to think of his name for some time and I can't. He had a Ph.D., and he taught homilies. I suppose, if one wanted to analyze it, everything he said was probably a platitude. Every sentence was a quotation from Cicero or Ovid or Catullus or Homer, or whatever. I'm sure, if you'd had to listen to this kind of thing now, you'd say, "Come on, get off of it. Say something real." But they were pearls, and I swallowed every one. He was inspiring. I wanted nothing more than to impress this man and please him, and how could I do that except by learning my lessons and getting hundreds on the tests? I studied four years of Latin and two years of Greek. It was heaven.

Then there were two other men. One was Dr. Templeman, who also taught Latin. Now, Templeman was a very different sort from "Mr. Chips"; he was very romantic. He moved me immeasurably because I will never forget his stories of

being in a foxhole in the First World War, with the bullets going by, and surviving this by reciting poetry to himself. Of course he knew all of Homer and Virgil by heart. I carried this [admiration] to such an extreme that when I went into the army in 1943, what I carried with me was a paperback copy of [Francis Turner] Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, which I still have. It is in absolute tatters, but I still have it. It was with me all the time. I never memorized it the way Templeman had memorized Virgil and Homer, but I read it constantly, and it was wonderful.

Templeman used to have us students to his house, and where did he live but in an apartment around the corner from Mount Vernon Place, a block up from the Enoch Pratt Free Library on Cathedral Street. We'd go there, and he always had music on the turntable. He would say, "What would you like to hear?" And I would say, "Oh, anything would be all right, whatever you've got there." Then he'd say, "Suppose I play some Dvořák?" I would say at that point, "I don't know that piece," and he would tell me I was going to know it, because it was incomparable and it was something one must know. So he played it, I listened, and I loved it, and ever since, it's something I must have played hundreds and hundreds of times. Mr. Templeman was very English in his manner and in his appearance. He looked like T. S. Eliot: slicked back hair and a sort of pale, gray complexion. He wasn't very well, Templeman, and he died soon after. Actually, he was wounded during the First World War, and whatever it was caught up with him.

So we listened to music, and he'd give us sherry, which I'd never had before. Sometimes it would just be myself, and sometimes there would be several of us. For me this was the height of civilization. I mean civilization in every sense of the word: not just learning and that sort of thing but of *being* civilized. He just had an ordinary apartment, of course, but to me it was you know. . . ah! He had lovely things, books everywhere of course, and nice furniture, and we had sherry in these crystal glasses. I was absolutely inspired.

There was a third teacher whose name was John Pentz—my English teacher. He was sort of a round man, short, who loved English literature, poetry, and Shakespeare in particular, and he loved to teach. When I was in his class, listening to him recite Shakespeare, and talking about it and what it meant, I was in seventh heaven. He was wonderful. There were times when I could recite all of Macbeth. I can't do that anymore, although I can recite long passages. It was a sort of pedagogy that doesn't exist anymore, which is too bad I think. One learned not only to read poetry but to say it, and the exercise of memory played a very, very big part in education, a loss which I think is terrible today, because our whole world is nothing but sound bites. You can't get anybody to read a book, much less memorize a few lines. So I think we've lost a great deal in that respect.

I'm very interested in the history of reading. I think about the history of reading as an extension of the memory. If you think about how people first read, they

didn't; they were read to. And then even before that, they told stories to one another. Do you know that in certain cultures the mind was so attuned that it was possible for people to sit around the fire and hear a ballad or a tale once, and they could remember thousands of lines? Of course they repeated it soon after and repeated it continually. But this is really amazing. Well, this is off the subject.

SMITH: But it points in a direction. Did you have teachers at Johns Hopkins that you were as close to?

EDELSTEIN: Yes, oh yes. I left Baltimore City College, and I went immediately to Johns Hopkins. I want to tell you just one anecdote about my school days before getting to college, because it made a big difference in my life. I don't say this in terms of crediting myself with anything; it was just the way of the world then. There was another fellow, whose name was coincidentally also Melvin, and he and I were rivals in the school. We were never friends. We knew each other, we were friendly, but we were rivals in the sense of who was going to get the highest grade average—everything was grades of course. You could get one hundred, but nobody ever got that. Actually, Mel was a year ahead of me, and my idea was to better his record. I didn't, but he graduated with a 99.9 average from the Baltimore City College, and it made the newspapers and everything. My ambition was to do as well, if not better. I didn't. I got 99 point something. Not bad. I had heard that Mel was studying Italian, because he'd gotten interested in this guy called Dante something or other. Since he

was studying Italian, I figured I would too. I began to look into Italian and I found that I loved it. This is by way of getting into the subject of college.

So high school ended, and the war was already on, and everything was accelerated. Schools and colleges went full time. I had this scholarship, and I knew of course that I would be drafted at some point, so I wanted to get in as much college as possible. I tried not to get drafted, but I thought that it probably would happen, as it did. So I went to college immediately after high school—the next Monday, or whatever. Now, Johns Hopkins was, and to some extent still is, a great, unusual university. It was small, and it had a fantastic reputation. It was started in the late nineteenth century by people like Josiah Royce, the great philosopher, and Daniel Coit Gilman, who had gone over to Germany to study the German system. Everything was a seminar system. There was a main library, but every department had its own library. It was primarily a graduate school with this appendage of an undergraduate program, but in reality there was very little distinction.

I arrived on campus, it was wartime, and it was relatively unpopulated. Of course I had hung around the university quite a lot before, checking out this place where I knew I was going to spend so much of my time; as a matter of fact I thought I'd be there forever. My ambition was to go to Johns Hopkins, go to graduate school, and become a professor there. That was it. My horizon didn't really go beyond that, because a lot of the people that I respected and knew had done just that. When I

arrived on campus, the professorial staff was populated by the most illustrious group of men—and one woman—that you can imagine. Sidney Painter, the historian of chivalry, wrote fantastic books on English and French chivalry during the Middle Ages. Frederick Chapin Lane was the great historian of Italian economic history primarily, but he also wrote a book on Italian maritime history. Venetian history was his specialty. Charles [Southward] Singleton was the "single"—to make a bad pun—most important scholar of Italian and Dante studies in America at the time. And Harold F. Cherniss, the great historian of ancient Greek philosophy, was there, as well as Leo Spitzer, probably the world's leading historian of linguistics, and his side kick, Anna Hatcher, who was also a great linguistics scholar. Everybody would sort of whisper about them, because we thought she was his mistress. Leo Spitzer spoke every language under the sun. His ambition, he once told me, was to have an article in every learned journal that existed, and in every Western language. [laughter] Charles A. Barker and [C.] Vann Woodward, the American historians, were there, and Hans Tietze, the historian of modern German history, and William Foxwell Albright, whom I mentioned before. It was all mine—and the few others who were there.

At that time I had a crush on an older woman; she was five or six years older, and her name was Janet. She was one of these people from the old country, or her family was. She was interested in somebody else her own age, who was an historian

of mathematics, and he became very famous. His name was Abe [Abraham Joseph] Sachs. He came up here, quite coincidentally, to Brown University, to work with Otto Neugebauer, the preeminent historian of mathematics in this century. They studied Babylonian tablets. He was an archaeologist-cum-mathematician, and since Janet was interested in him I was going to outdo him in this field. So I went to William Foxwell Albright and I said I'd like to become an archaeologist. He said, "Okay, sit in on the seminar." It was some relatively elementary subject—the history of the Near East or something like that. I could see very quickly that that was not for me. I was not diligent enough for that.

Then I went to Harold Cherniss, this fantastic man, who died just recently. When he left Hopkins he became a member of the permanent cadre at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. First I went to the registrar and I said I want to study Greek; I'd been studying Greek in high school. He looked in the catalog and said, "There's no course in Greek scheduled, but why don't you go see Professor Cherniss? Maybe he can think up something for you." It was that kind of place. So I went to Cherniss. I can never forget him, a pudgy guy sitting in this smoke-filled room. He had this huge pipe; it used to make me sick. I decided the only way to overcome it was to smoke one myself. He never cleaned his pipe, so it was just awful, but you got used to it. He was sitting at the end of a long table, around which he would sometimes have seminars. That was his office. He sat me down and I said I want to

study Greek. He asked me why. I said I wanted to be able to read Homer. He asked me what Greek I knew. I said I had two years in high school and I didn't really know very much, and so on. He said, "All right, you can read Homer with me." I said, "Well, wait a minute, I'm not . . . " He said, "Do you want to study Homer or don't you?" I said I did, of course. He got up and went to his shelf. He asked me, "Do you have a Greek dictionary?" I said no. "Do you have a Greek grammar?" I said no. "Do you have a copy of Homer?" I said no. So he went and got a copy of Homer, a dictionary, and a grammar, and he gave them to me. He said we'd meet once a week, at such and such a time. "Here you are." I was to come back the following week, having read such and such lines. I said, "But I don't know how." He said, "This is the way we're going to do it." And that's the way we did it.

I went to Charles Singleton and said, "I'd like to enter your intermediate Italian class." He said, "Do you know Italian?" We became great, great friends. In later years, he'd left Hopkins to become a visiting professor at Harvard, and then he came back to Hopkins. He became the first chairman of the humanities program. there. For all his old-worldness, he had come from Missouri. He was a farmer. I have a photograph of him naked to the waist with a straw hat and blue jeans, sitting on top of his tractor. He had this big farm in Baldwin, Maryland. We became very good friends later and I was there when he died, which was really suicide because he didn't want to face this terrible cancer that he had. But he was actually cruel to me,

because I came to the first class and he looked up and he said, "Oh yeah, you're the one who thinks you know Italian." So he said something and I replied, and I used an archaic form of the word meaning "day." Today we would say *giorno* for "day, but in *La Bohème,* the word *di* was used for "day." Maybe I was showing off, because I used *di*, and he leaned forward, with everybody else tittering around the table, and said, "How do you know that word?" I said I knew that word because it was in *La Bohème*. I stayed in the class, and I guess I did all right. I don't remember much about it.

Charles Singleton was a great scholar, but he was a mystic. He did fantastic studies on Dante and the *Divina Commedia*, but he was a believer. Now of course, with a more critical eye and mind than I had in those days, I realize there are other ways to read Dante than simply the theological one, but for Charles Singleton this was the most important aspect of Dante. His *Divine Comedy* was a way to approach God. Like other rituals, you had to approach it step by step, the way Dante went through the circles of Hell and ascended into *Paradiso*. Beatrice and the virgin mother have a lot in common; the threads are many. Singleton gave a very famous seminar. It met once a week in the late afternoon, and it ended whenever it ended. People came from all over the world to attend it. It was always limited to a small number, so we could read and talk, and I got myself into it. It was one of the most fantastic intellectual experiences I've ever had in my life. It took two years. We

started with the *La Vita Nuova* in the first year, and the *Inferno*, and then the last year was the *Paradiso,* alone. We would sit, having read the assigned portion, and we would talk.

SMITH: You didn't do *Purgatorio*?

EDELSTEIN: Oh yes, *Purgatorio*, of course. You really had to be on the ball. Singleton was very demanding. I used to be a little disconcerted because every now and then he'd go off into a trance. I mean this literally. Sometimes it was kind of frightening. You know, his eyeballs would go up into his head. It seemed like it lasted forever, but it probably was just a minute or two, and then he'd come back to earth. But he was brilliant. He wasn't terribly interested in anything other than the mystical approaches to Dante. To read Dante purely as literature was anathema to him. To read Dante as social commentary was maybe forgivable, but he wasn't particularly interested. There were two approaches that were okay by him: one was the purely linguistic approach, and the other was a religious, mystical experience. It was one of the most fascinating and enriching things that I've ever done.

So I skirted and skipped around. I studied American history with Vann Woodward, Charlie Barker, and French medieval history with Painter, and Italian history with Lane. It was with Lane that I thought, "This is where my future lies." I decided to concentrate on Italian history, and I did, and then I was drafted. I was eighteen, and I went into the army, and that's another story. It's one o'clock.

SESSION TWO: 5 NOVEMBER, 1994

[Tape III, Side One]

SMITH: When we ended yesterday you were about to be drafted.

EDELSTEIN: I was eighteen, and I had been expecting it for quite a long time. I tried to get in as much as possible at the university. I went full steam, worked all the time, just as everybody else was doing, but that inevitable day came. It was winter or early spring, '43, and I was drafted, having undergone all the demeaning examinations and experiences that everyone else has described very well. There were the tearful good-byes from my family, and I went off with the usual feelings of trepidation and wonder and all that sort of thing. I didn't go very far at first because they sent me to Camp Mead, Maryland, where I waited around for a long time.

My experience in the army and the war was a mixture of things. It of course was war, and I had a lot of bad, unhappy experiences. I saw a lot of terrible things, but at the same time, as I look back now, with hindsight, it was a really liberating experience. I think this was true for many people. It was especially true for me because it took me away from the environment that I had always known through my first eighteen years. It really took me away for the first time in my life, and it opened up worlds. I suppose in many ways it changed my life, just as other kinds of experiences also changed my life. In any case, I spent a couple of months in Camp Mead. I was able to come home often, or my family came to see me I think more

often, because it was a very easy drive from Baltimore.

I was sent up to New York City to go to school. This was the first of a number of very fortuitous kinds of accidents in my army career. In typical army fashion I was supposed to learn how to be a cryptographer, and I thought that was going to be really fascinating, but it never got to that. At that time the army had an encampment of sorts at the old City College of New York. I guess there still is a CCNY, but it's not what it was then; it's become part of the City University of New York system now, with this sort of open enrollment that is the policy of the entire CUNY system. It's hardly the great university that it used to be. I'm sure you know about its history and the fantastic things which were done there in terms of teaching and learning. But it was also a function of the society that existed before the war and the children of immigrants who attended there.

In any case, it was a spectacular academic year. It was really extraordinary. All of us who were there were barracked in what had been an orphanage on Amsterdam Avenue way, way up there on 138th Street, between the main building of CCNY and the Hudson River. I slept in the top bunk of double bunks in this huge barrack-like hall; it was enormously long. But I was lucky because I had a bed which was close to the bathroom, which of course was twenty-five sinks in a row and twenty-five urinals in a row, that kind of thing. But I was quite comfortable, and I studied history and geography at CCNY. I remember there was a big emphasis on

geography, which has stood me in very good stead; it was wonderful. And more Italian, and what else? I can't remember the other courses; the history and geography courses stand out in my mind. So there I was for the academic year, studying at CCNY during part of the day, mostly just mornings. There was a minimum of army rules to obey: bunks had to be neat and there was the inspection of the bunks and the footlocker stood at the end of the bunk. Shoes had to be polished and there was roll call and so on, but it wasn't onerous. I didn't make too many friends at that point in that group, because everybody sort of went his own path, they all had different courses of study. But I remember one fellow, who was a Mormon. He was the first Mormon whom I had ever been in any real contact with, and I was fascinated by him and his stories. I think it was the first time he had ever been out of Mormon society, so he was equally interested in other people's lives, and we sort of went around together for a while.

Mostly I was alone, and I discovered New York. Now, in those days, you could go down to a place that was just for the soldiers who happened to be going through New York, and you could get free tickets to everything. You had to go down in the early afternoon, and you could get a ticket for that night's performance of the opera, a play, or a concert, or whatever was going on in New York, and there was a lot going on in New York during those years. Well, I went to everything. I was out every single night. I went to everything imaginable. Not only music and theater, but

exhibitions too, and I never paid for a thing. You were supposed to be in the barracks by a certain time, and I very seldom made it. You know, it's rather hilly up there around that part of New York, and rocky, as is all of Manhattan, and we had discovered a way of slipping around and under the fence. Somebody had cut a hole in it. So nobody was ever there and we always got in late. When you're that age you don't need much sleep.

I walked everywhere. There were many times when I walked from the theater section all the way up to 138th Street and thought nothing of it. In New York in those days you could walk anywhere. A lot of times I sat in Central Park at night, which of course would be suicidal today. There were girls, naturally, and we'd sit in Central Park together, and I discovered museums. In those days the block where the Museum of Modern Art is, on 53rd Street, between Fifth and Sixth, was not as developed as it is today; the block opposite MOMA was still brownstones, and I remember sitting on one of those brownstone's steps all night long, trying to make out probably with this girl, which didn't work because we spent the night sitting on the steps, talking. I remember that, but I don't remember a thing about her, so so much for her attractions. I can't remember what she looked like or her name or anything else about her, except that she was female. But there it was.

It was really exciting to have this entire city just at our feet, and it was a really great year. On top of which I learned a lot in academic terms. We were taught by the

regular faculty of CCNY, and there were students who had not been inducted and were not part of the army, so it was wonderful. One of the best things was the Loewinsohn Stadium. It no longer exists, but it was just below the main building of CCNY, and they had concerts at night in good weather. They stopped it because as airplane traffic grew heavier and heavier the racket of the planes destroyed any musical sound that was going on. I heard all kinds of music that I had never heard before. During that year I discovered musical operettas, which I still love very much. Of course they stopped Loewinsohn Stadium activities because, being wartime, there were blackouts and such things, so they couldn't have the concerts at night. But it was marvelous in the nice weather to sit out there in the open and listen to the music. I can remember sitting in the stands, and the concert would be interrupted periodically to announce once again the sinking of some ship by the Japanese in the Pacific, or the landing on some atoll or something like that. I don't know why they did that, but that was always happening during those concerts. So it was really a great year; it was exciting. And then that came to an end.

I don't think I finished the academic year, because . . . Boom! Overnight, the way things happen in the army, I was picked up and transported to Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky. Camp Breckinridge is on the Ohio River, and on the other side of the river is Evanston, Indiana. I was there at the camp for the better part of that summer, and I had the most astonishing experience. Camp Breckinridge was a

holding area, where you waited to be gathered together into various units and sent overseas. It's very beautiful there . . . rolling hills, very pleasant. I don't know if it's Kentucky blue-grass country, but it's sort of manicured countryside. And then there was Evanston for big-town entertainment, such as it was.

After a couple of days of the orientation that we had to go through, we were called out, and several of us, I included, were told that we were going to report to the motor pool, because we were going to learn how to drive various kinds of vehicles while we were waiting to be called up to form a new unit. We were various "loose ends," and they were going to form a new division. I was kind of pleased about this because I sort of envied the people that I saw who were drivers. They had a charmed life. They didn't have to report in all the time and they seemed to have a lot of free time, so I thought this was going to be great. So we went down to where the motor pool was to report to Sergeant so-and-so, and when it came my turn to say "here," it didn't come up. Everybody else was assigned to go here or go there, and I was left standing there. So I said, "You didn't call my name out." They asked me who I was and I told them. "Well, you're not on the list." I asked, "What am I supposed to do?" They told me to go back to the barracks where I came from and speak to the sergeant there. So I went back to the barracks and I spoke to the sergeant. He said, "Don't give me any of that stuff. You were supposed to go to the motor pool." Back to the motor pool.

Well, this went on for several days. I was lost, as far as the army was concerned, or at that particular moment. It didn't take me too long to figure out that this was ridiculous and I could make better use of my time. Now, there was a wonderful, low, one-story wooden building that had porches all around it and was rather attractive. It sat all by itself in a nice field, rather pretty, and there was a little stream running nearby. This was the library, and it was a very good library. In addition to being a library it was a music center, and they had tons and tons of records. So after shuttling back and forth between one sergeant and another, and being told, "We don't know who you are. Go back where you came from," I decided I would go to the library. This lasted for something like two months. Every morning the sergeant would say, "Go to the motor pool." I'd go out with the others, veer off to the library, and I'd spend the entire day there. The library was just one great big room, and there was never anybody else there. I read, I wrote tons of letters and postcards, and I listened to music. I can remember the first time I discovered Rachmaninov. Up until that time I had not known his music. I liked Romantic music very much, and Rachmaninov was certainly a Romantic. Now sometimes he bores me a little bit, but not always.

On weekends I'd go off and do other things. I remember getting sick on a roller coaster once. I threw up on everybody and everything. I don't know whether I'd eaten something, or I had too much too drink. It was sickening. Sometimes I'd

explore the countryside, or go to Evanston, and go to restaurants. I'd go with the other guys, and sometimes alone—I think more often alone than not. One time I went home. I had quite an experience, actually. I went home to Baltimore by train and on the way back to Camp Breckinridge a young woman with a baby got on the train. She sat next to me, and somewhere along the voyage she got up and said, "I'm just going to go to the bathroom, I'll be right back. Do you mind watching the baby?" I said, "No, go ahead." She never came back. We were near a stop, and I remember it was soon after we left the Baltimore station. She had abandoned the child; she got off wherever this next stop was. I was getting worried and I spoke to the other people around me, and nobody knew what had happened. I told the conductor, they stopped the train, the police came, and the MPs, and I was taken off the train. I said I had to get back or I was going to be AWOL and this was serious business, this was wartime. They said they knew all that, but this was also serious business. I was the last person to see this girl, and here's this baby. "Didn't she give you her name?" All this kind of stuff. I didn't know anything. So, anyway, it was quite an experience, I was up all night, and I was late. I took another train, and I had to go through the whole thing again with the top sergeant. They didn't punish me or anything, but it was a scary experience.

So I went back to my library and my music, and it was absolutely marvelous. It was a mild summer . . . Arcadian, and it was wonderful. But that ended very

abruptly, and the next thing I knew they had found my records, they knew who I was, and where I was supposed to be, and I was on a troop train going to Norfolk, Virginia, for embarkation. It was a sealed troop train. We went from Evanston, Indiana, all the way up to the Canadian border and around and way, way down south. They did that in those days because spies were watching the trains to see how many troops were getting ready to go to embarkation points. I was pleased because somehow or another we knew we were going to Norfolk, Virginia, and that meant we were not going to the Pacific. We thought we were going to Europe, and although the shooting was wilder there, it was not going to be as bad as the Pacific. And I was interested in Europe, but not the Pacific.

Finally we got to Norfolk, Virginia. We were there for a short while, maybe a week, while we were getting more processing, and then we were put on one of the many liberty ships, with the accompanying naval vessels. Everybody knew these terrible stories of ships being sunk, and we zig-zagged across the Atlantic for many, many days. I can't remember how long it took to cross the Atlantic, but because of this zig-zagging it was a long time. It was unpleasant living. There were stacks and stacks of bunks down in the holds, which were dismal and smelly and dark and crowded. Fortunately the weather was very good and mild, and you had to do guard duty. You had to stand out on the deck for four hours—four on and eight off—and watch for submarines and airplanes. Nothing happened. So it took a long time.

On that voyage I made friends with a guy who became one of my closest friends and remains so, though we don't see each other very much. He teaches at the University of Nebraska. He is half Italian, and his name is Raphael Zariski. I think he too is a historian . . . or no, he's interested more in political science. Raphael Zariski was the son of Oscar Zariski, who was a mathematician, I think, or a philosopher, or both. He taught for many years at Harvard and was big in probability theory and that sort of thing. Raphael's mother was Italian and her maiden name was Cagli. She was the sister of Corrado Cagli, a great artist I later discovered, who made a big name for himself and was very, very good. They came from a section of Italy which I later became very interested in in an academic way.

Raphael was born into this multilingual family, but at home they spoke Italian and English. Raphael and I managed to work it out so that we would have guard duty at night at the same time. So on this long voyage from Norfolk, Virginia, to Casablanca, we would stand out on the deck at night with nothing but the sea, dark sky, and the stars, and Raphael took it upon himself to teach me colloquial Italian. It was wonderful. As I say, we became good friends and we remain good friends to this day. Distance does its thing of course, and time does its thing, so we're not in close contact anymore, but I know he feels the same way about me that I do about him. When Eleanor and I were first married and lived in Cambridge, so did he, and we saw a lot of each other then.

After we arrived, I didn't see much of Casablanca or North Africa, because it was the war and this was just a staging area where we were going to get ready to go to Italy. It was camp life, muddy, tiresome, not very pleasant, with more processing and army rigmarole. I don't remember how long it was, maybe a week or ten days, something like that. I really didn't see anything, unfortunately. They put groups of us in open boats and we crossed the Mediterranean. There were twelve or fifteen soldiers, and the Navy people who ran the boats. It was an open boat, but there was an area down below where you could pee and that kind of thing. We crossed over at night and stopped briefly in Sicily for a day.

SMITH: This must have been after the Italian Campaign?

EDELSTEIN: The Italian Campaign was still going on. Sicily had been liberated, and then there was the landing at Anzio, and the troops were just on the point of entering Rome. We were transported again at night, in another open boat, from Sicily to Naples. It was not a long voyage, but that was one of the most exciting nights of my life, as it would have been for anybody, because Vesuvius was erupting. It was, as you can imagine, extraordinary. Were these bombs, or was it the volcano? [laughter] Unbelievable. It meant a great deal to me, many years later, to read that magnificent book by Susan Sontag called *The Volcano Lover*. If you've not read it and you want a fantastic literary and historical experience, you should read it. It's about Lord Nelson and the Hamiltons, and volcanos, and the phenomenon of collecting. It's a

really remarkable book.

In any case, we landed and then we were in another staging area, and there was more processing to get us ready to go to the front. In the camp there in Naples I met somebody else who became one of my closest friends, and has remained so to this day, Mortimer Jagust. He is a medical doctor. I think we were in the same tent or in adjacent tents. He and I took to each other, and we discovered Naples together. Naples of course is an extraordinary city. Somehow or other Mortimer had met a girl, and she came from a very good family. She lived up on the hill where all the good families lived, overlooking the city and the Bay of Naples, which is of course one of the most beautiful natural sites in the world. We were very lucky because she invited us to her house, where I met her sisters and other girls and we had very good time. We went there a couple of times and we listened to music. There were big debates about who was the greatest conductor in the world, and that kind of thing.

Then the curtain fell on all of these good experiences, and I was shipped up and Morty Jagust went somewhere else. I was shipped up to what was known as the Gothic Line, but first I went to Florence, where the war paused for a while. I've forgotten exactly where I joined the front, but it was just below Florence. I was assigned to a number of different outfits. I don't know why now, but I was a replacement. I was not initially part of a division, but whenever a division had lost men and they needed replacements, I came from that pool. So I was part of the 34th

Infantry Division for a long time, and I was part of the 85th Infantry Division for a long time. At one point I was assigned to British troops and I was in the Boboli Gardens with the troops the night the Germans blew up the bridges of Florence. I saw it myself. It was terrible, and totally unnecessary. It didn't help them get away any faster; it was just an act of meanness on their part.

Before I went to Florence I was with the troops that were approaching San Gimignano, the town with those great medieval towers, and I recall vividly when the order came that we had to stop, because some of the men, including Frederick Hartt, who wrote so much about Michelangelo, said, "You can't bomb San Gimignano. It's bad enough, what we've already done outside of Rome." Somehow they stopped the order to bomb San Gimignano, and we entered that magnificent town. Then there was Florence, and these were just days of spending your life on your stomach, crawling through mud and rocks and having to get up in the middle of the night in ice cold rain to go out on guard duty. Your life depended on a redneck sergeant who you had to follow. But he really knew how to move around without attracting attention, and he knew his way with guns, although I knew my way with guns too. Actually, to my great surprise, I got all kinds of decorations for sharpshooting. I couldn't believe it, but it kept happening. I was very good with that rifle. Anyway, I saw Florence for the first time, and of course this made an enormous difference in my life.

The war proceeded, we came to that famous Gothic Line during that winter of '43–'44, and everything stopped. The Germans really dug in in the Apennines north of Florence and south of Bologna, and everything just stopped. Every night was more miserable than the previous one, and there were terrific bombardments. I remember the Indian troops, these exotic men with their beards, and these soldiers who would hold hands. I'd never seen anything like that in my life. And their mules, because only the mules could go up the muddy, slippery slopes of the Apennines; they're beautiful but treacherous, very steep-sided. It was scary; I was terrified every minute. I saw a lot of people go—wounded, killed. I shot off an awful lot of ammunition.

[Tape III, Side Two]

EDELSTEIN: I'm happy to say I never saw anybody shot from one of my bullets, but I saw very vividly and closely a lot of people get hurt. I saw a lot of American soldiers hurt themselves, as a matter of fact, in order not to have to go through another day of this. Finally it came to an end, we moved forward, up into the Po Valley, and the war ended. I moved back and forth a number of times before that, and I remember that day, as everybody who lived through it remembered. Somehow the movement of the army got me back to Tuscany—I can't remember the details now. I was on guard duty. Incidentally, I never got any higher grade in the army than private first class. I tried everything. I wanted to go to this training class and that training class and I wanted to go to officer's school. I wanted to be more than a

pfc, but it never happened. I don't know why. I'm sure I wasn't a great soldier, but I obeyed orders, and although I was never a terribly physical kind of person, I was in reasonably good shape and I was able to do what everybody else did. I always thought I was more intelligent than the people who were giving me orders, but that goes without saying in that kind of circumstance. Anyway, I don't know what it was, but I think I'm in the company of a lot of people in that respect.

To continue with my story: I was outside of Lucca, which of course is one of Tuscany's most charming and most interesting cities, and I again was doing guard duty. The war with Japan of course had ended and I don't know what we were guarding against. Maybe the war had not ended entirely. The chronology has gotten fuzzy in my mind, but there I was, outside of Lucca on the day that Franklin Roosevelt died. Lucca is surrounded by a wall, as so many medieval cities are, but it's an unusual wall because it's so wide that there is a two-lane area on which you can drive on top of the wall. Have you been there?

SMITH: No, I haven't.

EDELSTEIN: It's very beautiful, and people walk up there, around the wall. But I was down at the bottom, and behind me was this great wall. I had been walking around, it was night time, and somebody called from somewhere that Roosevelt died. Of course I was deluged with tears. Everybody was crying. I don't know, the setting, the time . . . everything about it was unusual, and it was really the end of things. On

the day that the war came to an end I was in the city of Verona, sitting in a barber's chair. The barber's shop was on the second floor of a building overlooking the piazza. The windows were open, and there was a little balcony with an iron railing. I was in the first chair, and at that point I was being shaved. There was this enormous uproar from the piazza below. The war was over. The barber ran out on the balcony with the razor in his hand—he had only half shaved me—and then he ran out, down the street, and I never saw him again. I had to wipe the rest of the shaving cream off. I don't know whether I finished the shave myself or not. I only remember that he was gone and I had to get out. I took the cloth off and the towel, and I ran out into the street. There was a huge party, and it went on forever, with everybody kissing and embracing and drinking and all that kind of stuff; it was fantastic.

Later, I was in Milan. How I got from one place to another, I don't recall, but there was an enormous amount of movement, and whoever kept track of things did a very good job, because I don't know how they did it. But things sorted themselves out, and there I was in Milan. I didn't see it myself, but this was the time when Mussolini was caught up north and he was brought back to Milan and he and his lady friend were hung upside down in a gasoline station there.

Then we made our way up to the Tyrol, which I fell in love with, and still haven't lost my feeling for. It was the end of the summer, and this was the end of the bad times and the beginning of a remarkable year in my life. The Pacific war was

over, and everybody felt good. I was in a camp, sleeping on a cot. It was real camping because we were two men to a tent out in this beautiful countryside, with marvelous, towering evergreen trees, and just a few feet away there was a little brook, doing what little brooks are supposed to do, gurgling over stones. It was spectacular, with the sunlight through these trees and the crisp air . . . very sweet. The war was over, and it was just marvelous. We hung around there for days and days, really not doing anything. I tried to make friends with a guy who was a coal miner from western Pennsylvania, a Czech fellow. I have a photograph of me with him. He was a very scary fellow. I don't know why he took to me or why I hung around with him, because he'd get drunk, and when he was drunk he was a totally different person. He was violent and abusive and he would say terrible things about Jews. He was just awful. But then when he wasn't drunk he seemed to be a nice companion. I don't know what threw us together, but there we were.

But most of the time, again, as in previous times, I was alone, and I used to go for long walks. We hardly had anything to do; it was just the usual roll call and inspections and that sort of thing. The army had announced its plan for sending soldiers back home to the States. They came up with a system of points, and you achieved points by age, length of service, marital status, and being wounded had something to do with it too. Well, I had a lot of service. I was in the army for three and a half years, as it turned out, but I had not been wounded. I had been hurt a

number of times by falls. I had one very bad fall and I was in the hospital, but that wasn't a wound. It was night- time and we were up on the Gothic Line, moving from one place to another. I had a huge pack on my back, and I fell and hurt myself rather badly. I guess I recovered, although now occasionally when I have twinges in my back which are arthritic, I am tempted to date it back to that time. In any case, I had not been wounded in the technical sense. So I had a lot of points, and I could have, within a reasonable amount of time, gone home.

There was one morning I'll never forget. It was early, the sun was out, twinkling through those trees, and the brook was making its merry little noises. The air was crisp and cool and sweet; it was absolute bliss, and I was enjoying every second of it. I came out of my tent and I saw a notice stuck to the tree, the bulletin board, which looked new, so I went over and looked at it. In its wisdom, the army and various governmental types had figured out that they couldn't send everybody home at once. There weren't enough jobs for everybody who was returning. All of these troops couldn't just descend on the United States, so they staggered people returning. The little notice said that in order to give the troops opportunities, as well as delay return of some people, the United States Army had arranged with various universities throughout Western Europe to allow people who were desirous and qualified to stay and take courses and live under army care. You could go to Oxford, the University of Paris, Grenoble, or the University of Florence. Maybe there were

others, but I remember those four very well.

In two shakes I was in the staff sergeant's office. I said I wanted to sign up for the University of Florence. The next thing I knew I was in Florence. On the western edge of the city is a park called Le Cascine. It's one of the most beautiful parks in Europe, along the Arno River. Now it's been absorbed by development. There's a very small, elegant race track in the Cascine. Mussolini had built luxurious black and green marble buildings there to house an elite corps of air cadets. It was gorgeous, absolutely gorgeous. There I was, ensconced in these quarters, which consisted of suites housing four men. Each had his own bedroom. There was a common living room area and a common bathroom area: toilets and sinks and showers. In addition to that, there was a big common room where one could sit around and listen to music. There were middle-aged to elderly ladies from the town, who would sit at a desk and help out with the needs of the soldiers who wanted to learn where to go and what to do, and so on. Each suite had assigned to it its own German prisoner of war who would do things like shine shoes, make beds, shave you, run errands, etcetera, etcetera. During the day there was the university. Well, I lived like a king. There was the city, there was the university, I studied history, I studied Italian. I worked very hard, actually, and learned a lot.

I remember calling home early on, telling my mother and father that I wouldn't be home for another year. My mother cried and said, "This is going to break your

father's heart." My father cried, and said, "This is going to break your mother's heart." [laughter] They said, "How can you do this to us? You've been gone so long. We worried day and night," and da-da-da. This was all true, of course, and I had feelings of guilt, but those were quickly subsumed, and it was, as you can imagine, a great year. Everything was open to us. We got our pay as army soldiers, I worked hard, and I walked. It was quite a walk from the Cascine to the university, but it was nothing to me in those days.

One of the three people who shared the suite with me was Mel Seiden, who lives in Boston. I've forgotten what his profession was, but he became a very rich man, and a very important figure in the art world. He and a group of people started Artemis, which is a sort of combine that buys art and then sells it. Artemis is quite a power in the art/commercial world. Mel became quite a figure in the world of finance, and in Boston cultural politics. Another roommate was a poet, Peter Viereck, who had to live down the fact that his father was a real Nazi. The fourth roommate was a man who became the assistant conductor of the Metropolitan Opera orchestra. For years later I used to listen to him being interviewed on Saturday afternoon for the Texaco program. I can't remember his name.

So we all went off and did our various individual things at the university, and occasionally we would do things together. Mostly we went off on our own. I became friendly with the nice lady, a Florentine society type, who sat at the desk, and

she told me about her experiences during the war, when she had gone off to North Africa. She was a rather motherly type and she reminded me of my own mother, actually. She looked like her a little bit, with sort of honey-colored hair, which my mother had. I can remember her stories of the war, washing without soap, and of course this was right after the war, and we had all kinds of rations given to us. I remember giving her soap quite frequently. We had cigarettes, which were given to us. Those were the days when people smoked. Nobody knew about cigarettes and tobacco, or if they did know they kept it to themselves. I certainly didn't know. I smoked some, but mostly I used cigarettes the way other people did. I'm sort of ashamed to admit it, but cigarettes were currency. I would do what everybody else did. I'd go into Florence, and there was a meeting point on the terrace in front of Santa Maria Novella, where you met people and sold your cigarettes. I got a lot of money for them.

And what did I do with the money? I went sightseeing. On weekends I'd go to Siena or Lucca or Rome. I did everything. It was just unbelievable. With all that I still worked very hard. I read, and I walked. I tell people that I walked from somewhere north of Rome to the Brenner Pass as a soldier, but then I must have walked twice as far exploring Florence. I really got to know it. I was out every possible minute, and I didn't even notice the winter. Actually, that was a rather mild winter for Florence. Florence can be very nasty in the late fall and winter, even the

early spring. I met a girl, one of Florence's society ladies, and because of her I met Bernard Berenson. He had come back to I Tatti after being hidden away in the countryside all during the war. The girl asked me if I would like to meet him, and I said of course. So I went up and met him, and he gave me a limp handshake and retreated to his blanket that he was covered up in, and that was that. [laughter] No brilliant conversation or anything. He was perfectly civil, but that was about it. Anyway, I can say that I met him.

It was just a fantastic year. I've often thought of what would have happened if I had stayed another year. I could have stayed a second year, but I didn't; that seemed to be too much. The year came to an end and I came home by way of Naples. And who do I see in Naples but Morty Jagust, my friend that I had met and had spent so much time with when I first arrived at that Naples camp—unbelievable coincidence. We couldn't believe it. We spent day and night together. There was nothing to do; we were just waiting and filling out forms until they told us to get on a ship. It was a long wait. Now that the war was over, Naples was different. We had lots of cigarettes to sell, and it was wonderful there. I think about it from time to time, especially when I observe the phenomenon of pizza in America. Pizza's become an American thing, but it was in Naples that I had my first piece of pizza and developed a standard by which I've judged all succeeding pizza. It reminds me of our conversation last night about bagels. The first pizza I had was from a brick oven that was built

right on the street. Sometimes the ovens were attached to a building. The pizza maker would stand right out on the street with his oven roaring away, and make a pizza, which he would sell by the slice. Well, the taste of that pizza, thin, crusty, is with me to this day, and nothing has ever equaled it. It was only much later that it began to be imported into America and it became such a staple of our diet and a part of our culture. Then it was re-imported into Italy as an American thing, just the way Coca-Cola and McDonalds and everything else have been imported. But anyway, Morty and I had a marvelous time again. We were constantly together. We went to the opera, and sat for hours and hours in the *galleria*. Do you know Naples?

SMITH: No, I don't.

EDELSTEIN: The two great *gallerie* of Italy are those in Naples and Milan. These are enormous structures, glass roofed. Somebody with an odd sense of comparison would say they were the first malls. In a sense they are. There are inside shops covering blocks; they're vast, vast, and very beautiful. They are places for the Italians to do what they do best, which is walk and talk at the same time. That's what people do there. You stop and have a coffee or go to one of the shops or a restaurant, and you walk up and down and talk. There's a wonderful book called *The Gallery* by John Horne Burns, which is very evocative of all of that. He wrote it shortly after the war. Anyway, we spent time there, and we'd go down to the bay and sit in cafés, and we just relaxed.

Finally we got on a boat, about which I remember nothing, and we just zoomed across the Atlantic. Home was new to me, because during the war my father had prospered in his career as a merchant. This was unusual in his life, but prosperity came to many people in the States during the war. It was at that point that he had begun to dabble in real estate, and for a while he did very well. He did well because workers came to work in the Bethlehem steel yards in Baltimore and various other places and they needed housing. So he did rather well, and my family had moved from above the store on Washington Boulevard to a nice house they bought on Edgewood Road in what was then a very pretty suburb of Baltimore. It's a slum now, but then it was very pretty. The house was set off, with a nice garden, lovely fruit trees of some kind in the back, and a big front porch. I think that was known as the Park Heights section of Baltimore. It was pretty, it was green—a typical suburban neighborhood. It was a block and a half from the big street where the streetcar ran.

I wanted to go back to the university, there was no question about it. I didn't even think about it. I didn't think that there might be other things to do. I just assumed that that would be my life, and it was time to go back, which I did. I don't think I had more than a few days to become acclimated.

SMITH: You just moved back into home to live with your parents?

EDELSTEIN: Yes. It just was taken for granted, you see. I went back to Johns Hopkins on the GI Bill, and they welcomed me back with open arms. I had a lot of

credits. I sat down with the university authorities and we added them all up. I had that year at CCNY, and then I had that year at the University of Florence. I became a teaching assistant. Actually, I had been a teaching assistant before, as an undergraduate. I don't know if I mentioned that. I was very pleased and honored about that because it was one of my first real jobs.

As I said, I worked for my father from time to time in one store or another, but I never really thought that was a job; it was more a way to earn an allowance. I always thought that work was sort of demeaning—selling ladies' underwear, sweeping the store and all that kind of stuff. But I did it. I worked for my uncle from time to time. Mostly it was an act of charity on his part. My uncle's name was Paul. He was my mother's brother. He was someone I never really knew very well, and I don't think I liked him, which was probably very unfair on my part. I didn't like him because I thought he was cruel to my mother and to other people in the family. He always argued with them. There was a traumatic scene from my childhood which really disturbed me very much for many years. Paul was in the poultry business and led a very different kind of life than we did. He was very worldly and sophisticated, or so I thought, and moved in other circles. He came around to see the family in token kinds of ways and he wasn't as nice to my grandparents as my mother and father were, so I always felt sort of suspicious about him. I'm sorry about it now, because I think he was probably a much more interesting man than I was ever able to

realize, and I had a jaundiced point of view about him because of my parents' feelings, and I never had an opportunity to learn about him for myself. In any case, my father and mother had lent him money, and he was paying it off by giving them a chicken or two once a week. That's what people did then; those were hard times. I was a very young boy, maybe ten, or nine; it was in the early thirties.

My uncle had his poultry business in downtown Baltimore, right where the Camden Yards ballpark now stands. You would go in there and you'd be in another world. There was a filthy smell of chickens; they're the dirtiest animals in the world. Men stood around with these bloody aprons and big boots, in all this gore, killing chickens right and left. My uncle would go off to the eastern shore of Maryland to get the chickens, which, like the tomatoes on the eastern shore in those days, were supposed to be the best in the world. They always tasted very good, I must say. But anyway, he'd come out of this dark hole covered in blood and feathers, holding two chickens by the neck and it was just awful. There were chicken coops all over the place, made of wood, and one of the jobs I had once was to clean them. You know, chicken shit is particularly messy. I didn't last very long on that job.

I overheard my mother once, screaming at my uncle, saying things were so terrible they didn't know what to do. She was in a terrible state, crying, and very, very unhappy. This must have been close to the time I talked about, when they had to move out of the house and into a cousin's house. My mother was asking her brother

how he could be so cruel, taking years to pay off this debt by giving them a chicken once a week. She said he'd have to come up with some money. He was saying, "Well, if I didn't give you that chicken you wouldn't have anything to eat." I thought he was very callous. I can remember that scene because I didn't hear many such things. My mother and father were very clever or very good, and I really wasn't exposed to much of what must have been a very horrible situation, not only for my family but for so many during that period. These traumatic moments, like the time that I asked for another bowl of soup, were really few and far between. I think that's why I remember them.

At one time my uncle had expanded from the chicken business into meat distribution. He had a very large refrigeration place where they kept the meat. I had another job with him once where I was supposed to go into this huge meat locker and keep an inventory or something. I couldn't stand it. I couldn't stand the sight of all that meat. I still can't. I was way ahead of the movement to eat less meat, I can tell you. I eat it occasionally, I'm not that pure. It wasn't only the sight of all that meat, but the cold; I couldn't stand the cold. That job didn't last for long either. So my uncle didn't have a very high opinion of me. He thought I was sort of wimpish. Anyway, I had all kinds of different jobs. So back to the university and the teaching assistant job. I had done this even before the war, and it was wonderful.

[Tape IV, Side One]

EDELSTEIN: It was marvelous because for the first time I was really earning something on my own. I think we got something like $300 a semester.

SMITH: In addition to your GI Bill?

EDELSTEIN: Yes. You see, I was paid, and the GI Bill took care of my tuition and stuff.

SMITH: So I assume you were focusing on Italian history?

EDELSTEIN: I was focusing on Italian history.

SMITH: What period?

EDELSTEIN: The Renaissance. I graduated in 1947, and I did well. The proudest thing I had—I wore it for a long time, till I lost it—was my Phi Beta Kappa key. I did all the things one does at that age that one thinks are important, which are not. In high school I had this National Honor Society pin and I actually wore it all the time. Can you imagine such silliness? And I thought this Phi Beta Kappa key was the real thing.

SMITH: So you got your M.A. then?

EDELSTEIN: No, I never did get an M.A.

SMITH: Oh, so you continued with graduate study.

EDELSTEIN: I just continued with graduate study. I fell into a rut, actually, and life was easy. I had this teaching all the time, it was easy, and I was living at home. I had

one very good friend, my closest friend to this day, although he lives in Baltimore: Joe [Joseph L.] Cowan, who is a psychiatrist. He's just recently retired. He went to medical school at the University of Chicago. It's funny . . . he writes letters. He's quite a correspondent. He also thinks of himself as a poet. He tries to express himself, and I really think that's great. His poetry is published in medical journals. He's an interesting fellow. He has a mind, and he uses it, and he makes very cogent observations about social things and politics and one thing or another. I'm a very poor correspondent, but we talk to each other periodically on the phone and we see each other every now and then.

In those years we saw each other constantly, I mean constantly. He and I used to play tennis together, but mostly we talked and we walked. We walked the city of Baltimore. His family lived not too far away, in an apartment. I never knew people who'd lived in an apartment before, and I thought that was the height of sophistication. His father was the owner of a big and very successful men's clothing store downtown, and he knew everybody in the city. In my silly view at that time his parents really out-classed mine because they went out for dinner and they dressed differently. They were very nice to me, and I was very much at home at their house. I was in and out, and Joe was in and out of my house all the time. He loved my mother. Everybody loved my mother because she talked so easily with everybody and she fed them so well. We'd sit on the lovely porch and talk long into the night. We'd

get into his car, and there was an all night hamburger joint on North Avenue just off of Charles Street. So we'd go there, and we'd get a booth, and we'd sit in this booth eating huge hamburgers and ice cream sodas, or enormous triple-decker club sandwiches. I can remember we consumed enormous amounts of food. That was our hangout, we'd go there all the time. It's a slum now, too, but it was nice then.

I had a number of friends, but I kept them separated, because they were from different worlds; they didn't know each other. I was very close to Joe, we saw each other constantly, but I also spent a lot of time with a totally different group of friends. I guess maybe it was the influence of the war, but I don't really think so. Those years at Johns Hopkins, between when I returned at the end of the war and 1949, when I left, were really years when I discovered different worlds—worlds upon worlds. Part of that was moving out of the close, Jewish family structure of Baltimore. Although I remained in Baltimore, I moved quite easily and with a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction, in a different world. I don't know where that time came from, but when you're young, you have it, you know.

I made friends at the university with three people in particular; they were all members of the history department, and they were all pillars of the WASP establishment in Baltimore—I'm not exaggerating—in terms of social, economic, and religious backgrounds and circumstances. My closest friend was Tom Copeland. Another friend, whom I didn't know as well but he was part of the circle, and we were

always together, was Pitts Raleigh. And there was a woman named Helen Garth. I don't know if Pitts is still alive, I've lost touch with him, but Tom Copeland has died. They came from old Baltimore families. They lived in beautiful old houses in the best sections of town. Tom lived with his mother and his sister down on Bolton Street, in a beautiful brownstone house. Pitts lived in a marvelous house with his mother in Roland Park, which is a lovely WASP suburb just north of Johns Hopkins, off of University Parkway; it's still a marvelous place to live.

I can't remember where Helen Garth came from, but she was very rich, and she came from an important family. She too was in the history department. She was a character. She was the sort of person who, having always had everything, could get away with making fun of it, or being eccentric. I can remember the very first time I came round to her desk. I told you about Hopkins establishing itself on the seminar system. All the graduate students had desks lined up one after the other in the stacks of Gilman Hall. Hers was behind mine, and I came around to meet her. She had a box, like one of those file boxes, which said "Odds and Ends" on it, and I didn't know what it meant, so I asked her what that meant. She said, "Well, you're a funny fellow; it means miscellaneous," and I said, "Why doesn't it *say* that?" She said, "It does say that. It says 'Odds and Ends.'" And that's the way she was. She wrote a very interesting dissertation on Mary Magdalene as portrayed in medieval sculpture in churches. She was interested in French sculptural representations of Mary Magdalene

on buildings. This was all new to me, and I learned a lot from her. We became very fond of each other. So the four of us were friends. Pitts was always in and out, and we fluctuated because they played bridge and I didn't. I had never learned to play bridge, and I was snobbish about it; I thought it was a waste of time. But they played bridge and drank a lot. I drank, but I didn't drink a lot, certainly not like they did. I guess when they were playing bridge I was with Joe Cowan.

I had a girlfriend for a long time during those days, Inez Riemer. We saw too much of each other. I really should have experimented and moved around a little bit more. But we were comfortable with each other, and she was very nice, an artist, and a rather good one. I lost track of her very soon after I left Baltimore, but I learned of her because she did a drypoint etching of Wallace Stevens. She married somebody who lived in Hartford. I saw this drypoint etching on the front cover of Trinity College magazine, and it was by Inez Riemer. She had a studio downtown in the section of Baltimore that I liked, near Mount Vernon Place again, and I spent a lot of time in her studio watching her work, and just sitting around listening to music and talking about art. I met a lot of Baltimore artistic types through her, and there again, I learned a lot. I hate to use such a banal word as "flowering," but I really opened up, and so many things happened to me.

SMITH: One of the things I wanted to ask you about was this tension between your Jewish identity and what might be called cosmopolitanism. One of the things about

the twenties and thirties is that's the peak period of anti-Semitism in the United States. Were you aware of the presence of anti-Semitism?

EDELSTEIN: I was very much aware of it, yes. I never personally suffered it in those days—not to an extent that it meant a great deal to me. But I was very much aware of it, my father and mother talked about it all the time. They talked about it at Dave Fishman's kitchen table on those Sunday afternoons. They talked about Germany and Europe. I think I knew more about Dreyfus at age ten than any other kid.

SMITH: But even in the U.S. most American private universities had their quotas.

EDELSTEIN: Oh yes, that's right, and so did Johns Hopkins, very much so. I was aware of problems that Jews had had at Johns Hopkins, particularly in the medical school. There was no question about it, they had very strict quotas and they were not quotas in the sense that we have them today in order to allow people in; these were quotas in order to keep people out. So I was very much aware of this and it was a constant subject for discussion. In our house and in other people's houses that I went to, there was always literature about it. Part of the Sunday afternoons at the Fishman's house was stocking up on all these flyers and magazines in English and Yiddish and Russian and Polish and Hebrew that he would gather together from the whole world.

I kept a clipping file myself. I had files and files and files. It's something I'd

taken over from my father, who always clipped things. I tell you, one of the sad things about getting older is that you have fewer and fewer people with whom to share the clippings. It's interesting. Just as there are fewer and fewer people to whom I can send postcards now when I travel. But you know, that's the way of life. But I still do clip, and when I read the newspaper I read it with a red pen in my hand. I'm a newspaper freak. I spend far too much time reading the newspaper. What goes around comes around; the names and the places are different, but the story is the same. But to get back to this "tension," I was very much aware of it, and these were the kinds of things that I talked about with Joe Cowan.

SMITH: What about in the army? Was there anti-Semitism?

EDELSTEIN: Oh yes, it came up every now and then and I'd have a wise-ass comment to make. There were lots of verbal assaults, and I would just walk away, or I would say something and court trouble, but I never got into physical fights over it.

SMITH: But you didn't seem to have the kinds of experiences that would push a person into a militant Jewish identity.

EDELSTEIN: No, no I did not.

SMITH: You felt that the world was open to you?

EDELSTEIN: Yes, but you see I kept these worlds separate. The social life that I led with my Jewish friends, my girlfriend and with Joe Cowan, was totally separate from the life I led at the university, where I had one Jewish friend, Herbert Zafren,

who was also in that graduate student group. He was a very observant Jew. He went off to become the librarian of the Hebrew Union Theological Seminary in Ohio, and became quite a scholar. He and I spent a lot of time together, but not outside the university; he never became part of that other circle I spoke of.

So my life was separated. There was a tension, maybe even a conflict, but that tension existed even before I was conscious of it or could name it. I'm not sure it doesn't still exist. I'm very Jewish. I'm not an observant Jew, but there's no question that I'm Jewish. I'm very much aware of my traditions and my inheritance, and I think very highly of it. For the first time in my life, here in Bristol, Rhode Island, as of two months ago, I joined a congregation. I never have before, but I did it here, now. The action was taken on the spur of the moment, but I think there was a long gestation behind it, especially here, in the shadow of St. Michael's Church, the church where my wife was baptized and confirmed as an Episcopalian, and where her father was a vestryman. Her brother was also involved in the church. He unfortunately is not able to do anything anymore, and it's very sad. Eleanor had three brothers. One is dead, one is eighty and not very well, but her youngest brother, of whom Eleanor was perhaps fondest, had a terrible accident eleven years ago and has been a vegetable in one of these places that he'll never leave.

But I ask myself, in what remains of this Yankee town, with its long history, why did I do this? I think I did it because this was a concrete way of establishing my

identity. I don't have any doubt that all these people with whom I have contact know that I am Jewish. Of course they do. But I feel the need to assert it—I hope the right way. There's a very interesting congregation here in town. It's only a block away, on High Street. It's very attractive, and tiny. There are two storeys; the sacristy is on the second floor. It's very pretty, more than a hundred years old. There was no membership or anything for some years and it was restored about twenty years ago. There's a very small congregation, many of whom do not come from Bristol, but from nearby communities.

It has services only every now and then. It has a Friday evening Sabbath service once a month, if that, and it's very ecumenical. I don't find the services terribly satisfying, because they are on a level which is elementary, to say the least. But I sense in everybody there the same feeling that I have, what E. M. Forster referred to in two words which are the best thing he ever said or wrote: "only connect." Everybody is there to make a connection with himself or herself and the person next to him, and all those people who came before us. I find that satisfying. The guy who conducts the services is not even a rabbi; it's too small a congregation to support a rabbi. They don't even import one for the high holidays. They've got this interesting fellow, a psychologist in Providence. He's a cantor, leading the service, and he's very bright. He made a joke, saying, "You might well ask why I'm here doing this," and he paused and said, "Because I know how." Which is true. He

knows his way around the hymns and the blessings and the prayer book and this, that and the other, and there's a first-rate chorus. I love the music there. To tell you the truth, it's as good as you get.

SMITH: Your general direction after the war was to move away from religion.

EDELSTEIN: I moved far, far away from it. I never forgot it, but it wasn't important in my life. And it's not the first thing in my life now. I feel that it's in place, where it belongs.

SMITH: Eleanor is not Jewish; was that a problem with your family?

EDELSTEIN: Oh yes, at first it was a big problem with my family and with hers. But that blew over. We met in Florence. Do you really want to hear all this?

SMITH: Sure, why not? You went back to Florence to study some more, right?

EDELSTEIN: Yes. I went back to Florence in 1949. It was the first year of the Fulbright grants. I had a Fulbright travel grant, and I had a second grant from the Italian government to study at the University of Florence, and it was a wonderful academic year. I lived in a *pensione* right smack in the middle of Florence, right at the end of the Ponte Santa Trinità. It couldn't have been more ideal: a marvelous *pensione* with a big window on the top floor of the building, from which I could see all of Florence and the hills of Fiesole on the other side of the river. So I went to the university and I studied with Gaetano Salvemini, and other interesting people, and I met Eleanor. That fall was cold, but I remember Eleanor and I spent Christmas

morning sitting in the sun at an outdoor café on the other side of the river. That afternoon was terribly cold and there was snowfall or freezing rain or something, but the morning was just gorgeous.

But to go back earlier than that, I was living in this *pensione,* and every week there was a free concert in the Corsini Palace, and I used to go to it. There was a guy named Ryerson, who I met at the university or in one of the cafés. He came from Ohio. I didn't think much of him of him because I didn't think he was serious. Somebody told me that the Ryersons of Chicago were very rich people—steel mills or something, I don't know. I didn't like him. One day, as I was going to one of these concerts, this guy Ryerson came along with Eleanor. We met at the intersection where the Lung'Arno and the end of the Ponte Santa Trinità meet. Eleanor was wearing a long, gray raincoat, belted. We were all going to the same place. That was it, that was the beginning. We continued to see each other here and there. Eleanor had come to Italy with a girlfriend, Ruth Welch, who was a school friend from Providence. Ruth was one of her close friends, and has remained so. She has lived in Geneva for many years. She came from Chappaquiddick. Eleanor and I spent our honeymoon in her house there—a one-day honeymoon.

In any case, Eleanor and Ruth had been in Italy over the summer, and at the end of the summer Eleanor decided to stay. She was living in Venice, but she got sick; she had some sort of intestinal problem. Venice is marvelous, a fantastic place

to be, but not if you're not feeling well when the weather turns cold and damp; it's not the place you want to be. So she decided to leave Venice and come down to Florence. She was going to look into the foreign language school, and she was going to write; that's why she was there. So we got to know each other. She wasn't very happy with the place where she was living. It was far out, and she always had to find transportation; she wasn't in the center of things. So I told her my *pensione* was right across the river, and it was gorgeous, and why didn't she move in there? Well, we've been together ever since. [laughter] That was it.

We lived together in that *pensione* for the remainder of that year. It was scandalous of course in those times. After all, in 1950 one didn't do those things. Today of course it's routine, but one didn't do those things then. We were very good friends with the young woman of the family that ran the *pensione* and she looked the other way. It was not an easy life. Neither of us had very much money. Eleanor had more than I did, but not much. I think she had $1,000 on which she lived the entire year. I had what I was getting from the grant that I had, so we ate in the student mess hall every night. But it was good, we did all kinds of wonderful things.

We decided that we were going to get married. I certainly don't regret getting married, but I think we made a mistake in coming back to the U.S. We didn't have to come back, but we thought our families would want us to do that. Who knows how different things would have been if we had stayed on in Italy, because that's what we

really wanted to do, just continue to live there. I would have found something to do. It was at that time that the appeal of academic life had begun to wear off. I didn't know what I wanted to do, I had no idea, but I knew it would have something to do with writing and books. Eleanor didn't know what she wanted either, but we were happy, and we loved being in Italy. We felt so much at home there. We knew a lot of people and we didn't need very much money. We didn't have very much, but we didn't need more. But we came home because we were really conventional people, when you come right down to it.

I remember we sailed home on an ocean liner; I can't remember which one it was. We sailed from Genoa down to Naples, to Lisbon. I remember showing Eleanor Naples, and we both explored Lisbon and loved it. Then we sailed to New York. It was a scene right out of a Marx brothers movie, because our families met us, and Eleanor went off with her family, I went off with mine, and they didn't meet. Eleanor's brother, Paul, the one that she was closest to, met her. One family didn't know about the other at that point, and we went off to separate hotels, because it was night and too late to make one's way to Rhode Island or to Maryland. I think I was really quite cruel to my family, because my father and mother and sister and I went off and had dinner, and after dinner I excused myself. I said there was somebody I had to see. Eleanor made whatever excuses she made, and I went off and met her and her brother, Paul; she had told him about us, so the three of us went off and had drinks. I

remember the exchange of letters they had; they were about my being Jewish. Paul was a very worldly fellow, much more so than most other people in his family. He had lived in Paris, had married a French-Russian girl who wasn't Jewish, but she was of a very different order than his family, and there was a lot of objection to her. Even so, he corresponded with Eleanor, wanting to be sure she knew what she was doing [regarding her relationship with me.]

[Tape IV, Side Two]

EDELSTEIN: There was nothing that one could take exception to; it was more to do with brotherly love and attention, that she should be sure of what she was doing and what the problems would be, and so on. We never had any qualms about how we could handle this. We had trepidations about having to go through the trauma, but so what. Eleanor broke the news to her family in her way, and I broke the news to my family, and of course it was very, very disturbing. It was just something that one had to get through. My mother cried and my father cried, and mother repeated what she said when I said I wasn't coming home from the army: "You're going to break your father's heart." And my father said, "You're going to break your mother's heart." And then my mother's brother, my Uncle Paul, got into the act. He called me in and gave me a very avuncular talk, saying that this wasn't the thing to do, that non-Jewish girls were never really trustworthy and they didn't have the high standards that Jewish girls had—all this nonsense talk, and I just listened to it all. Actually, Paul tried to

buy me off with x amount of money. I could go back to Europe and he would pay for it. So this went on and on, until it just died down.

Then the time came when Eleanor was to meet my family and stay in their house. Everybody worried about this, including me, and how it would go, but Eleanor has always been a master of social occasions. She's smart and she's charming, then as now, and she is sincerely and deeply interested in people, and in making things easy for them. She just charmed the socks off my mother and father. I think it was immediate; it was absolutely immediate. They just fell in love with her, from that moment on. That ritual they had gone through was only that, a ritual, you see, because nobody could have felt deeply about the kinds of things they said they felt and have acted the way they did, which was to accept her completely. My mother and father adored her, and she was very fond of them.

With my sister . . . well, with her there was never any question. We didn't even talk about it. Which is the story of my sister and me anyway. It's only in recent years that we've had any kind of real communication and have gotten to know each other as two human beings. But she was five years younger. I went off to the army when I was eighteen, during those years when she was becoming a woman. By the time I got home from the army she had her own life. I can't remember even talking about Eleanor with my sister.

My relationship with Eleanor's family was, I'm afraid, a different story.

Whereas there was an absolute immediate embracing of Eleanor on the part of my family, my acceptance by Eleanor's family was a totally different story; there was never an embracing. She met my family first. She came down to Baltimore in the summer and stayed in my mother's and father's house there on Edgewood Road, and then we decided that we were going to get married in the fall—forty-four years ago today!

SMITH: Oh!

EDELSTEIN: November 5, 1950. Guy Fawkes Day. We were going to live in Cambridge, and I had a job lined up. I decided not to go back to school; I dropped everything. I was going to get a Ph.D., and I never did, which is regrettable in some ways. I used to care about it, but I don't anymore; it's long gone. It would have made a lot of difference in very material ways, if I had gotten the degree. But when I broke away from academic life, I broke away so completely that for a very long time it was hard to pick it up again. There were all kinds of interruptions and different things happening, so I never did go back.

In any case, back to the family business. When Eleanor told her family about us she got a lot of flack from them and there was a lot of opposition. Her father was very much against it, her mother was very much against it, but she was fully supported by her twin sister and her brothers. Eleanor is a twin. She and her sister were very, very close, and her sister died tragically and much too young some years

ago. Martha was very supportive, and Martha and I loved each other; there really is no other word for it. We became very close over the years. I never was terribly close to Eleanor's brothers, but I didn't see them as much.

We knew we were going to live in Cambridge, so I moved there alone for a while. I lived in the apartment that we were going to share, and then the time came for me to meet her family. It was the end of the summer and I think I took the train, or Eleanor came up to Cambridge and we took the train together, I don't remember, but I do remember that Martha and her husband Ted met us at the train station and drove us in their car to Eleanor's parents' house. I was very nervous about it. This business about Jew versus non-Jew didn't bother me. I was more nervous about not knowing which fork to use—that kind of thing. It was more a class dilemma that I had than anything else, and it was always that way. I knew from Eleanor's stories as well as my own observation that she came from a very different kind of background, lived a very different kind of family life, in a very grand house. I'd had my fill even then of Eleanor's accounts of the role that her family had played in this town—very commendable indeed. So I was nervous about that kind of thing. I never thought about whether or not I was going to be accepted because I was a Jew. I've always known that that was a problem, but so far as I'm concerned that's a problem for somebody else; it's not my problem. I still feel that way.

Well, I managed to use the right fork. Everybody else was nervous too. I

know, from hindsight, having come to know them, that Eleanor's father and mother were just as nervous as I was. That family had a storybook background and history—storybook in the sense of usual, not in the sense of marvelous. For example, the name of Franklin Roosevelt was forbidden to be mentioned, and when he died, somebody said, "Oh, good!" The word "Jew" was hardly mentioned and if it was, one of the synonyms, like "kike" or something was used instead—not necessarily in Eleanor's house, I must say, but more in the houses of the people they associated with.

Eleanor's father's sister married a Jew named Austin Levy, who was so ostracized by the family that he decided that he would outdo that family in every possible way. He became richer, more important, a better citizen in every way that you can imagine. And then he died. I never met him, unfortunately, but he and Eleanor's aunt gave us a wonderful wedding present, with which we bought our first car, so it was very, very generous. A thousand dollars in 1950 was a lot of money. We bought a green Plymouth station wagon. Eleanor's oldest brother, Charlie, the one who's eighty now, had married a Jew, Barbara Hess. They're still married. She wasn't very Jewish in the way I was, because she didn't then and doesn't now talk about it; she doesn't refer to herself as Jewish. She's a good woman and she and Eleanor's brother Charlie have had a good marriage. They're together, they had two good nice children, and they take care of each other.

So I wasn't the first, by any means, but they were cool, to say the least.

Eleanor's father told her that it wouldn't last. He called me into his study during that first weekend I spent there. We'd hardly had a word to say to each other. I sat on a leather couch, which, when you sat down and when you got up made a sort of sucking noise—you know, that kind of thing. [laughter] He sat in his chair at his desk across the room from me and asked me just like some Victorian parent would have done, what were my prospects. Would I be able to support his daughter? Did I have a job? Well, I told him what my prospects were, I told him I had a job, I told him that I didn't think I could ever support his daughter in the manner to which she was accustomed, but I expected her to go to work. Then the talk was over, and things remained cool for a very long time. He sat in a corner when we were married. We were married in her house. That's what Eleanor wanted, that's what her mother wanted.

SMITH: Did your parents come along?

EDELSTEIN: My parents did not come up. This was a terrible thing, but it would have been worse if they had. So they didn't. They understood. It was a sort of unspoken but mutual agreement: they never met, the two sets of parents.

SMITH: Did you have an Episcopalian wedding?

EDELSTEIN: No, we had an ecumenical wedding. We had a Unitarian minister and a rabbi. The Unitarian minister was from around here, and he had a friend who was the director of the Hillel place at Harvard. So we went up to Cambridge and talked

to him, and they were both great. They conducted this simple but nice ceremony in the living room of Eleanor's parents' house. There were a lot of people there. Charlie lent us his car and we drove off to Chappaquiddick to spend the night in Ruth Welch's house, very, very close to that spot which Teddy Kennedy made famous. I think it overlooked that little bridge. I was teaching at Shady Hill School in Cambridge, a job which I got through Eleanor's brother, Charlie, who was also teaching there.

SMITH: This was a private—

EDELSTEIN: Private elementary school, very good, still exists; it's been there for a long time. It was an experimental school in its early days, started by I think the daughter of what's his name . . . Whitehead, you know, the philosopher?

SMITH: Oh, Alfred [North] Whitehead. It must have something to do with Charles Eliot Norton, though.

EDELSTEIN: And Charles Eliot Norton. All those people were together with him. All the Cambridge types, and the Harvard faculty sent their children there then, and they still do. It's still a very good school. Charlie Rockwell was more than a teacher there. I think he was a headmaster or a director. Whatever he was, he had a lot of influence there and had taught there for a long time. When I met him we were talking, and this was in the period when I didn't know what I was doing. I thought teaching children might be very interesting, and so I thought I'd try it, and they gave me a job.

SMITH: But pretty quickly you decided that you were going to go to library school?

EDELSTEIN: Well, not so quickly. I'll come to that. I taught for a year. Just to go back to Eleanor's family, little by little things warmed up, but we were never close. In a strange sort of way, I became closer to Eleanor's father, who was never a warm man. I'm sure Eleanor could relay a lifetime of incidents in which he was, but at least to me, and to many other people that I observed, he was never warm and outgoing. He had a remote sort of personality. He was at his best doing two things. He was a great yachtsman. He was at his best on his boat, because that was his metier, that's where he belonged. He was disdainful of anybody who didn't know what to do on a boat and didn't know the terminology.

As with every discipline, or sport, there's jargon that goes with it, and I didn't know it. I knew nothing about boats. I'd always admired them. I knew about fishing boats, and I knew about the boats in Baltimore harbor, the work boats, and I knew about the wonderful night boats that used to go up and down that my father and I took. One time I went with my father from Baltimore all the way to Norfolk, Virginia, down the Chesapeake Bay. You were supposed to go to bed and sleep, but I didn't, I stood out on the deck all night. I was very young, but it was just heaven. So I knew about boats like that, but I didn't know about these big sailboats, and all the terminology that goes with them and the protocol and all of this kind of stuff. All of which was very important, not only to Eleanor's father but to the entire family,

Eleanor included. This was a part of their lives; they didn't have to think about it. So I was clumsy on the boat, and I think Eleanor's father was rather disdainful of me about that. But we went on a couple of cruises with Martha and her husband, Ted. Eleanor's mother never cared much for being on the boat; she just put up with it.

Having a drink before dinner was routine in Eleanor's family. You had a drink before dinner even if you didn't want to; that was what people did. This was the other occasion when her father was at his best. The family would gather in the living room, have a drink before dinner, and then sit down at the dinner table, and it was at those moments that he was a little bit more relaxed. I was more tolerated than accepted by him, but with Eleanor's mother there was never a real coming together. She had her own problems. I can remember many, many good times, but I was sad; I was really never at home.

We went through an awful lot together. I can remember being here in the 1954 hurricane, when Bristol was devastated, and Eleanor's family lost a lot. They had a boathouse down by the shore, and it was just gone. This was a substantial house, not just a little shack, and I can remember the roof, just as if it were a piece of paper, floating off in the wind. Well, everybody lost an awful lot; it was really devastating. The '38 and the '54 hurricanes were horrible. So everybody had to pitch in and rescue things and work; if you didn't you might die. Things were crashing down around you. I did what everybody else did, which was to run around trying to

secure things and helping out and one thing or another. I nearly lost my life trying to rescue a boat. I was cut off from the land. I think I gained a lot of respect in their eyes for that.

I also made [points] with Eleanor's father because I knew how to make a good martini. Little things like that were important. Eleanor's father prided himself on making martinis and it was a big ritual. I think the making of it was more important than the imbibing of it. But I watched him, and I knew how to do it. I had never made a martini before, but one day he was busy, or something had happened, and he couldn't make the martini. I went ahead and made it, and it was perfect. I think it's kind of ridiculous to gain respect that way, but those kinds of things were very important to people at certain times. I don't mean to relate that story in a critical kind of way. Eleanor's father was expressing an attitude that was rather common. There were some people in their circle who accepted me warmly and graciously and sincerely, immediately, and others did not. There was one family that was very close to them, in whose house I was not allowed.

SMITH: Not allowed?

EDELSTEIN: Actually, I went in, but the father of the household went out, because he wasn't having any of that kind of thing. I never went again. I wouldn't have gone if I'd known this would happen. But in some ways this goes back to your original question about "tension." That kind of thing was never a moment of tension for me.

That was the way it always was, and I didn't take it personally. I brushed it off. It wasn't the kind of thing that kept me up at nights. I thought, "The hell with it."

So there we were in Cambridge, in a nice little apartment on Shephard Street. I went off to school to teach, which was a great adventure. I soon came to dislike it, because I wasn't good at it. You don't like things you're not good at, and I spent an awful lot of time at Mount Auburn Cemetery when I should have been hanging around the school. Shady Hill School is adjacent to the cemetery, which is one of the great cemeteries in America. It's naturally very beautiful, it's laid out very well, and it's filled with the graves and monuments of great people. It's a wonderful place to wander and have lunch and read tombstones. It's something I've always liked to do and still do whenever I have the opportunity. There is a great cemetery in Baltimore, Green Mount Cemetery. The architecture and design of cemeteries all through the nineteenth century was quite fascinating. I take photographs in cemeteries whenever I can. So I used to sit in Mount Auburn Cemetery.

I don't even remember the ages of the kids I was teaching; it seems like it was the fifth grade. I was teaching Latin, American History, Civil War, and math. The sciences and mathematics have never been a strong point with me. Later on in life I became interested in the history of science. But not in science [itself]; I'm interested in it as a cultural phenomenon. So I had to teach math, and I was terrible at it. And the Civil War has never caught my imagination the way it has so many other people.

I'm sure I'm missing a lot, but I've just never been interested in the Civil War. I know most of the basic facts, but its history as an important aspect of American growth and development has never played a large part in my scheme of things. I enjoyed teaching Latin because I was more at home in that subject than anything else. I knew what I was doing, to put it bluntly, whereas I didn't know what I was doing with the other subjects. Fortunately, I discovered at an early stage, long before I did any real damage to them, that I wasn't really very good with kids. I don't think I am to this day. I can't remember what age a fifth grader is.

SMITH: About ten years old.

EDELSTEIN: That's a rough period. They're smart and they're active. They always got the better of me. So the year ended, and the school and I said an amicable good-bye. I think they were probably as glad to see me go as I was to leave. What was I going to do? Again, I didn't know.

SMITH: And you wanted to go back to Italy, still?

EDELSTEIN: Oh always, always, but that was always in the background. I was fortunate. In my life I've spent long, wonderful times in Italy. A lot of it thanks to the Getty, of course.

Anyway, during that summer I had an interesting job. I met a group of people who were doing an Italian edition of the *Federalist Papers*, and I had the idea that the *Federalist Papers* were one of the great achievements in American political and

cultural history. I loved them. I can't remember how I made the connection with these people, but there was going to be this Italian edition of the *Federalist Papers*, and because I knew Italian pretty well, I got involved with them and I helped a lot with the translation. There wasn't any money involved. I had only begun to really read the *Federalist Papers* seriously at that point. I did an awful lot of reading in that period. We lived only a few blocks away from the Widener Library and I spent enormous amounts of time there, reading and talking to people; it was a very rich period of my life in that respect. The translation came out many, many years later.

I didn't know what I was going to do next. I didn't want to go back to school, and teaching hadn't worked out. Somehow or other I met a man who was the rabbi of the biggest and most influential reform Jewish temple in Boston. He hired me to do two jobs: one, to edit and bring out the congregation's newsletter, which came out every other week; and two, to research and write his sermons. [laughter] I did this for a year. Oh it was fantastic, what a job. They paid me quite well. There were two or three women in the office, who helped me with the newsletter, gathering information and putting it all together. There were all these little notes about meetings of the various clubs and when things were going to happen, and notes about the holidays that were coming up, who died and who was born and who got married, and all this stuff.

Writing the sermons was something else. This rabbi was an amateur historian,

but not a very good one. He and his new bride went to Spain for their honeymoon, and he went to Toledo. There was a rumor going around that El Greco, who had lived in Toledo, was really a Jew. He came from Greece, and he was supposedly Greek, but he wasn't Greek, he was a Jew. One day when I came into the rabbi's office and sat down, he said, "The sermon next week is going to be about my trip to Toledo, and I want you to do research to show that El Greco was a Jew." I said, "But he wasn't a Jew." He said, "I want you to do the research to show that he was a Jew." Now, what do you do? I fudged it; I wrote a sermon in which I referred to the persistent rumors. I did research it, and there were all these rumors. I didn't go to the sermon. I didn't go to many of them, but that one I deliberately stayed away. I didn't want to hear what he was going to do with it. [laughter]

I did this work with my left hand, so to speak. I had a lot of time. Every now and then somebody would say, "Where have you been?" I'd say, "I had to do research for the sermon. I've been in Widener Library all this time." Well, it was true I was in Widener Library all that time, but I wasn't doing research for his sermon, I was reading. That year came and went and it became a joke, because I kind of lost respect for that rabbi; I didn't think he was very good. There he was, up there giving these brilliant sermons, and getting all of this acclaim—he lasted for a long time in Boston—and everybody was patting him on the back for this stuff that I had written. I didn't think he was a very good speaker at that.

I realized, at the end of the year, that this wasn't going to work. I had to find myself. I guess it was late spring or early summer, and we took a trip down to Baltimore to see my family, just to get away. We were sitting in the garden at my parent's house, and it was very nice, with lovely fruit trees and comfortable furniture. I don't know how, but a sort of germ had come into my mind. One of the people in graduate school at Hopkins when I was there was a man named Andy [Andrew H.] Horn. He got his Ph.D. at Hopkins in American history. He was a *cause célèbre* because he married the secretary of the history department. He met her when he came there as a graduate student, and they fell in love.

[Tape V, Side One]

EDELSTEIN: Well, he studied history, but then he decided that he wanted to be a librarian, and/or teach in library school, and he became Larry [Lawrence Clark] Powell's assistant at UCLA. After a year there, he went back to Virginia, where his mother was living; she was old or sick or both. He had married at some point and then they went back to California. I stayed in close touch and we became very close friends and remained so until he died. He played a very large part in my life in a number of ways, and in this way in particular. While Eleanor and I were sitting in the garden under a tree, I said something like, "Why don't I go to library school?" It was as if curtains parted or lighting struck; it just seemed so right. We talked about it endlessly from then on. What I was really interested in was books. When was I

happiest? I was happiest when I was holding a book. I wrote to Andy, or called him, or both, and asked him, "Where is the best place to go?" He said Michigan had the best library school in the country. Unfortunately, it didn't remain that way, but in those days it was. I had time left on my GI Bill. I got in. I think it happened overnight.

The next thing we knew, we were in a crummy apartment on N. Thayer Street [in Ann Arbor]. I didn't want to spend a lot of time, so I took a very accelerated course, so that I would finish in a year and a summer what was supposed to take two years, including two summers. I crammed it all in like mad. I hardly saw Eleanor. She was writing a book in that lousy apartment, and she was there all day typing away while I was at the university going to class, or studying in the library. I'd leave early in the morning and come back late at night.

SMITH: You went there with this depth of scholarship. You probably have more of a scholarly background than the average library school student.

EDELSTEIN: No question about it. I skimmed through it. I bought lots of books and did a phenomenal amount of reading. We didn't have much of a social life. We knew these people Henry Koch and his wife, whom I had known at Hopkins. He too was a graduate student at Hopkins, in medieval German history, and then like so many of us, he gave it up. We didn't know that we were going to be in Ann Arbor together. We spent a lot of time with them, we were very good friends. We're still

friends but we don't see each other or hear from each other very much. Zafren, from Hopkins, whom I mentioned before, was also there.

I became friendly with somebody I had not known before, John Parker, and his wife. He became a brilliant director of the James Ford Bell Collection. If you're interested in the period of exploration and discovery of the Americas that's the collection you have to see. It's one of the great collections in the world. So [John] and I saw each other in classes, and we'd have coffee and meals, but nobody had a real social life. We'd go out to the Koch's farmhouse and play with their kids, and that was the most fun we had, and I think we spent one weekend in Detroit. It was a cold, miserable winter, and it was just hard work. Even though it was hard work, as I say, I really just skimmed through it. The library school curriculum was not something to brag about, and I found it very easy, so I took tons and tons of classes. All I wanted to do was just get through. I had no idea where I was going to go or what I was going to do.

Then something happened—it was like that tree in Bolzano, in the Tyrol. One day there was a notice on the bulletin board. The Library of Congress had an internship program. You had to apply. You had to have a certain grade average, you know, all the usual things. They were offering a beginner's salary, and you would move through the Library of Congress. I and another fellow from the library school got the internships. I remained friends with him, Roger Trenens. Roger Trenens got

his degree at Michigan at the same time I did. So Eleanor and I packed up our things, drove back, and I remembered that drive. I remember the fierce heat at the end of that summer on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Oh God, that Pennsylvania Turnpike was so miserable. I can just feel it. We set ourselves up in Washington, and I was at the Library of Congress.

It was an interesting year. The internship did just what it was supposed to do. It introduced the interns to every aspect of work in the Library of Congress, which is a great and wonderful place, as I'm sure you know. You would work in a month in one area and somebody would shepherd you around and introduce you to people. It was a marvelous experience, but I do remember the interns were sort of resented by the regular staff, because we were very privileged. We had the run of the place, we were being paid a nice stipend, we were treated very well, and we had the promise of a job at the end. It was certain that if we wanted to stay on at the Library of Congress we could, or if we wanted to go elsewhere there was no question that we would have a job, because it was a wonderful year of training.

This was early on in the history of the LC interns. In somewhat recent years the LC began to hit hard times and got a series of Librarians of Congress who were inadequate to say the least; it went down a bit and the internship program I think was suspended for two or three years. They've been resumed, and they're okay. But I was lucky enough to be there when they were really going very strong and people

took the training of this group of people very seriously. Somebody had had the vision, the foresight, and the thoughtfulness to establish this program. It wasn't intended that everybody who went through the internship would stay on at LC, but there was no question that you could have a very good job if you went through the internship successfully. It was rigorous; it wasn't a vacation by any means. You had to show up and you had to participate and you had to contribute to the unit that you were attached to for that particular month. I had a good year, I learned a lot about a complex and important institution, and I met many people.

When that year was over I was asked to stay on, and I was invited to become the assistant to Charles A. Goodrum, a really extraordinary man. He was the reference librarian for what was then called the Congressional Research Service. You know that by law, as the name would indicate, the Library of Congress is the library of the Congress of the United States. As time passed and things developed, it took on the role, not always willingly, of the national library of the United States. It's not used by the Congress the way it should be used, and for a long time its potential as the national library was hardly realized. There were many great librarians of Congress, and there were real nothings. It's a political appointment, so sometimes they've been good and wise and sometimes they've been abysmal. In any case, the training that I got was terrific, and I was asked to be the assistant to Goodrum. The Congressional Research Service was divided up into various areas: economics,

agriculture, history. It was a library within a library, and it still is. I think it's called something else now; they've made a variation in the name.

Goodrum was a particularly American type of phenomenon. He came from Kansas and he talked like a country hick. He was a sort of roly-poly fellow, but he was the one to teach the lesson that you don't judge somebody by what they look like or sound like. He's one of the brightest, most insightful, well-informed, wisest men I've ever met in my life, a marvelous man, very, very talented. He may be approaching eighty now, I don't know. He's a very good novelist. He's been writing novels since he retired, and they're wonderful. He wrote a history of the Library of Congress. I guess it's a coffee-table book, but it's extraordinarily well done. I think he's brilliant, but he conceals all this in this small town, country boy type of personality, this persona with which he faces the world.

So he was my boss, and as different as we were, we got along beautifully. I had an extraordinary and very enlightening year working with him. The job was a great education because you never knew what the day would bring. You never knew what kind of inquiry would come over from the Capitol, what some school kid in Wyoming had written to his Congressman to find out about. Naturally the Congressman couldn't be bothered, or any of his assistants, and they would shoot it over to us. In those days Sar Levitan was working there and then he moved on and he became professor of economics at Georgetown University. Then he was head of

all kinds of government commissions. He was a brilliant economist, and he worked on a lot of very important bills. There was a black man who was very interesting. I can't think of his name, but he became very important later in District of Columbia politics and made a big name for himself in the sixties with hunger strikes and all that sort of thing. So there were interesting people and it was a wonderful experience.

At the end of about a year there was a notice on a bulletin board about an opening in the Library for a reference librarian or assistant librarian, something like that, I can't remember precisely, in the Rare Book Division. I had a big debate with myself at that time because I knew of course that if I stayed where I was I would have a future. There would be promotions and I would be part of a very lively, active world of today; I would be responding to things happening in Congress. If I went to that other job I'd be going into a cloister; I'd be a little bit removed. It would be much more bookish and bibliophilic and bibliographic, everything that rare books, manuscripts, special collections connotes. For better or worse, I chose the latter path. I've had a good career in it, but that was a real turning point.

I went upstairs into that rare book room, and I spent something like eight years in there, working for Frederick Richmond Goff, who was chief of the division. He was a Rhode Islander, from Barrington. His mother and Eleanor's mother, it turned out, had some kind of schooling together. Freddy was a very interesting fellow. Not always likable. He was a little bit of a snob, he kept very much to

himself. He was also a poor teacher, but he was very good at his work. He was an incunabulist. I think he went to Brown. If he didn't go to Brown he had spent a lot of time there, working in the library for Margaret Bingham Stillwell, who was one of the great book people of the time. Somebody ought to do her biography. She was well ahead of her times and she studied incunabula. She was the director of the Ann Mary Brown Memorial, which has now been merged with the university library at Brown but then it was independent and had really important collections of incunabula and other things. So Freddy was a student and a disciple of hers, and also a student and a disciple of Lawrence Roth, the historian from Baltimore who wrote many interesting things about colonial printing. He was for many years director of the John Carter Brown Library, where I hang my hat from time to time now.

At that time Freddy was the editor of what is known as the *Third Census of Incunabula in America*. He was writing articles day after day on the history of fifteenth-century books, and he was very widely published. I had been in the Rare Book Division before of course, just to look it over, and I was in several times when I was being interviewed for the job. He said, "Well, it looks like you're made for this position." On my first day, I walked in, we shook hands, he said something like "Welcome. Your desk is over there." It was on the other side of the room from him, sort of semi-private, and that was it. That was it. He never told me what to do, how to do it, where, why, nothing.

SMITH: What did you do during your seven years in the rare book room?

EDELSTEIN: Everything, I did everything. But it was self-taught. But that's a form of pedagogy too. Some people think the way to teach a child how to swim is to throw him in the water, and that's what he did. There were other people around of course, and I asked questions, and I poked around and found my way about. I became the assistant chief of the Rare Book Division. When Freddy wasn't there I was the boss, and in certain areas even when he was there. He was a man who never varied his routine. At five minutes to twelve he put on his coat and went to lunch, and he was back at five after one, or whenever it was, and he ate the same thing every day in the same place, sitting in the same chair. He'd go and play bridge with the same group of people and he'd take the same vacation every year with the same group of people. But that was his lifestyle, and it was all right.

He came to our house a couple of times. He warmed up when he had a bourbon or two. He always liked the bourbon that we had. He and Eleanor would talk about Rhode Island, and he was all right. But he was a cool sort of fellow, we never became close friends. I discovered, accidentally and through third parties, that he had a very high opinion of me, which pleased me. I certainly had a high opinion of him as a scholar and a bibliographer, but I didn't think much of him as a person. I wanted someone warmer and friendlier, and somebody to talk to about our mutual work, but I didn't get that from Freddy. I got it from lots of other people at the

Library of Congress, in other departments. I was pretty happy there.

SMITH: But how did you decide what to do from day to day?

EDELSTEIN: Well, it forced itself upon me. There were readers to take care of, there were dealers to talk to, there were bibliographies to check, there were space conditions that had to be addressed, there were staff problems that had to be solved, all of these things. There were exhibitions to put up, and there were publications to write. Maybe I'm painting too black and white a picture. Freddy and I had lots of conversations. I think there were two doors to the stacks. I could go in either on my side or his side. When I passed his desk in his little semi-private cubicle, he'd say, "Listen, by the way. The copies of Evans haven't been annotated for a while. Maybe you ought to catch up." Or, "What is our next exhibit going to be?" And we'd talk and decide on an exhibit. The annual reports had to be written, and a lot of attention and care were given to them. They were always written over his name, and then one year, out of the blue, it was both our names. But he didn't say anything to me, he just did it.

Then I wanted to publish an article about some things which came to my attention in the rare book room holdings. It had to do with maritime history and saints. I saw some very interesting representations of St. Elmo's fire, and I made some interesting connections. The article was illustrated and it appeared in the *American Neptune*. I had given it to Freddy to read before I submitted it and he said,

"That's very nice, I like, it, but before you submit this for publication you really should show it to Lawrence Roth at the John Carter Brown Library. It's right up his alley, and he knows a lot about this kind of thing." Well, I was delighted to send it to Lawrence Roth. I had fears that it would come back blue-penciled all over. It did come back with some interesting suggestions, but all in all it was okay.

So there was communication between Freddy and I, but he was not a warm man. He was a good man and a good scholar and a good bibliographer. We went to his house a couple of times. He had a nice little house down by the Potomac River. I really made my own way, and I began, little by little to make a name for myself in bookish and in bibliographic circles. I became interested in professional library organizations. People would come to the Library to read and to study, and I met lots of people, many of whom became colleagues and friends, or both. We had a nice life in Washington. We moved out of Capitol Hill, to Georgetown. We rented a house on Q Street, almost at Wisconsin, and we were there a couple of years and then we bought a house on R Street, and our first child came. Both our boys are adopted. We couldn't have children of our own. I'm going to make a parenthesis in the story, if you're interested.

SMITH: Sure.

EDELSTEIN: I really don't know what the point of this interview is, so I don't know what's germane and what's not germane, but we couldn't have children. When we

were in Michigan, the University of Michigan Medical School was having one of those investigations into fertility. We wanted children from the time we got married, and we wanted to have children while we were young. Nothing happened and nothing happened, so we enrolled in this fertility program; it was just awful what you had to go through. Much later we discovered it was my fault. You know what happened? I forgot to tell you that when I was in the army I got the mumps, so it was late in life. It can have all kinds of serious consequences. The doctors, long after the fact, figured out that the reason Eleanor could not conceive was because when I had the mumps it affected my glands in such a way that we couldn't have children. So we adopted both boys, five years apart. Paul, our oldest one came along shortly after the death of my mother's brother, who I've told you about, and in the traditional way you name the first child to be born after a relative. Although I wasn't close to my uncle, he was my uncle, and one develops certain warmer feelings very often after a person's gone than you had before. In any case I had no objection.

Nathaniel came along later. And he was named Nathaniel just because we love the name. He doesn't. He's always changing his name, or shortening it or substituting something else for it. He thinks it's too long to write. Nathaniel Edelstein is quite a mouthful, I guess. In any case, these were good years. We bought this house on R Street, and it had a nice yard, and life was very pleasant, but I was getting bored.

SMITH: Before we go on, I have a few questions. What is involved in becoming a specialist in rare books? Did it mesh well with your previous interests?

EDELSTEIN: It meshed beautifully. What does it involve? You can go to library schools, or you can go to something like the rare book school that's run by Terry Bellinger at the University of Virginia, where you learn a lot of techniques and facts about the history of books and printing, paper and type, conservation techniques—all of which are very important. You can learn about protocols having to do with buying, and principles of book collection and the proper way to treat trustees, donors and friends of the library, and all of those things. But the world of rare book librarians, collectors, bibliographers, and bibliophiles has an element in it which is very difficult to describe and very difficult to quantify and qualify. There's something haphazard about it, something intangible. It has to do with a feeling for the book— I mean that in the most general sense—not just as a medium, but as an object. It has a lot to do with whether the person in question is a reader himself or herself, and the symbolic values that exist in this object, whether it's a codex, a scroll, or a cave painting. When you get the right combination of knowledge, experience, self motivation, and love for the material, then you have a good bookman, or book-person, as you have to say these days. I don't know if that answers your question.

SMITH: Not entirely, but that's okay. I'm not sure that it's something that can be answered just so. But at the end of your seven years at the Library of Congress you

felt like you were a bookperson.

EDELSTEIN: Oh, there was no question about it. I felt secure, I had made a name for myself, I had published a fair bit, and I was a frequent attendee at professional meetings. I became known as a bookperson in my own right, and I was somebody that people sought out to get answers to things. I was well known in the trade.

SMITH: What were the acquisition goals or priorities of the Rare Book Division at the Library of Congress at that time?

EDELSTEIN: Well, they were very broad, because it covers the universe; everything from a lock of hair from Lincoln's head to the great collection of illustrated books that Lessing J. Rosenwald donated, to Thomas Jefferson's library and notes. Everything from the most superficial kind of thing to the richest kinds of material.

SMITH: When you got there you didn't have the task of building from scratch, as you did later?

EDELSTEIN: No, I didn't have the task of building from scratch. My task was to build on the strengths that were there. I worked very closely with the Stern family from Chicago on the [Alfred Whital] Stern Lincoln collection. The Rosenwald collection was Freddy Goff's bailiwick, but I couldn't help but be closely involved many times with Lessing Rosenwald and his gifts to the Library of Congress. My relationship with the Rosenwalds continued when I was at the National Gallery. Rosenwald gave prints and drawings to the National Gallery, and books to the Library

of Congress. So, no, there were not new areas to build up.

I did make a contribution though, because Freddy was receptive to an idea I had to scour the main stacks of the Library for significant pieces of modern literature. I should say at this point, Richard, that there's always been and there remains to this day, a different kind of tension in my professional life. From the time I was a student at Johns Hopkins, I have had one foot planted in the area of Italian Renaissance studies, and the other foot was planted five hundred years later; fortunately, the distance and time were not correlated, so I could keep my balance.

[Tape V, Side Two]

EDELSTEIN: So this tension, this duality, has been part of my make-up ever since, and it exists to this very day. It doesn't bother me, and I don't know that it bothers anybody else. While I was at the Library of Congress I did my bibliography of Thornton Wilder. Some time ago I had met Donald Gallup, who was the curator of American literature at the Beinecke [Rare Book and Manuscript] Library and professor of English at Yale. We became and remained good friends. I adored Thornton Wilder's work, and later met him and came to like him enormously, and I became very good friends with Isabel Wilder, his sister, who's still living, in a nursing home. It was Donald Gallup who suggested that I do this bibliography and that Yale would publish it. I did a lot of it on company time, so to speak, with Freddy's knowledge and encouragement. I spent a lot of time going up to New Haven and

working in the Wilder house, and in the Beinecke Library. Some years later I gave all the stuff that I put together to the Beinecke.

You know, the play *Our Town* can still move me almost to tears. It's one of the gauges that I use with people. Anybody who doesn't respond to *Our Town* is off my book, so to speak. A lot of people think it's maudlin, and I don't. I think it's brilliant and rich and deep and very moving. I think *The Skin of Our Teeth* too, is one of the most important contributions to American literature. So, how did I get on this subject? I've lost track of what I was saying.

SMITH: You were talking about one particular contribution you made at the Library of Congress, which was modern literature.

EDELSTEIN: Oh yes, that's right. I said to Freddy at one time that I was discovering, as I wandered through the stacks, the first editions of many [modern classics], and he said, "By all means, do with them what you think is right." So I had masses of stuff transferred and found all kinds of goodies. Those were good times, and I "grew" in that job. I did very well. Freddy was pleased with me, the Library of Congress was pleased with me, but after a certain point there was nowhere to go.

SMITH: You must have begun to develop a network.

EDELSTEIN: Oh, yes. Absolutely, I traveled a lot. Freddy was generous. I traveled, I went to meetings, I met all kinds of people, and I saw dealers. I was constantly going up to New York, and the dealers would come to us. The Rare Book

Division of the Library of Congress had much more money in those days than it has now; now it has a pittance, which is not to the credit of the Library of Congress and the way they appropriate their money. It's true that they get a lot of gifts, as well they should, being the national library of the country, but you can only do so much that way, and they have missed opportunity after opportunity for getting things which belong there. In any case, in those days it was different, and all kinds of fascinating people came from all over the world, and I had plenty of opportunity to meet them. I'd go to professional association meetings, and I took a very active role in the proceedings and the work of the Bibliographical Society of America, and so on. I visited the Pierpont Morgan Library, and the Folger [Shakespeare Library]. So, yes, that was the beginning of my network.

In some ways you build a name for yourself, or an image, or a reputation, and that becomes something almost separate from yourself. When someone like our friend Tom [Thomas] Reese at the Getty thinks of me, I hope he sometimes thinks of me as Mel Edelstein, this guy with glasses and beard and so on, the person, but I suspect that when he thinks of me he thinks of the network that I represent. A lot of people are that way. They call, and write, they want to know who to see here and who to talk to there, and who's the best man to give appraisals. I know the answers to those kinds of questions, and the reputation that I have with colleagues and with people in the trade is something I'm very proud of.

Anyway, that's where all that started. I couldn't have been in a more central place for that than the Library of Congress. For so many people in so many different disciplines and areas of work, you have to be there. In those days I was everywhere. If there was a meeting in who knows where, I would go to it, because I was interested in making connections and learning, and the travel allowance was good; I never seemed to have a problem there. I don't think I went to Europe.

SMITH: You were not going to Europe during that decade?

EDELSTEIN: I don't think I went to Europe. I can't really remember, to tell you the truth. I may have gone once or twice, but I'm not sure now.

SMITH: Well, if you don't recall, that says that even if you did go, it wasn't an important part of your life at that time. Your life was focused in D.C.

EDELSTEIN: And I had a young family: Paul in 1956 and Nathaniel in 1961. But I belonged to committees and I went to meetings and conferences. There was the Bibliographical Society of America, and the Rare Book and Manuscript Division of the Association of College and Research Libraries, which was in turn a part of the American Library Association. They were all part of each other, but at the same time they were all rather distinct institutions with different agendas. I had met Robert Vosper at one of these meetings and we had come to like each other. At one point, later, I became president of the Rare Book and Manuscript Society for a year. I remember the annual meeting when I was president was in Philadelphia. There was

an opportunity to learn about that great institution concerning American history, the Library Company of Philadelphia, and the Pennsylvania Historical Society, which were joined to each other. The wall between them had been taken down, and it was just unbelievably rich; it was so wonderful. I made good friends with Edwin Wolf, who was then the director and librarian—a great scholar. He had been a protégé of the legendary Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach of Philadelphia. So my worlds were enlarging and coalescing in a very nice way.

I remember attending a meeting of the Rare Book and Manuscript Society in Kansas City, and Bob Vosper asked me something like, "Where are you going from here?" Well, to make a long story short, he said, "Your future is with us." He told me about Franklin Murphy. I knew about Franklin Murphy because I had a very good friend named Joe Rubinstein, who was very important in my life. He and I were very close friends. I met him first when he lived in Tucson, Arizona. He had married a woman named Consuela, who was Mexican. You asked me before about tension between Jewish life and the other kinds of lives, and I hadn't ever thought about it until this very moment, but here was Joe Rubinstein, who came from the same kind of background that I did, who married this Catholic lady. God, she was beautiful. I wonder if she's still living . . . no, no, she died. They had a child, Raphael Rubinstein. "Raphey," he was called. They had a stormy marriage, real ups and downs and departures from each other, but we never talked about this kind of thing. We were

very close, but we never talked about that [feeling of tension]. I think for him, as for me, it was not a big deal. It didn't mean that much, because if it had we would have talked about it.

Joe was the rare book librarian at the University of Kansas when Bob Vosper was there and Franklin Murphy was the president or chancellor of the University. Joe Rubinstein was legendary. He was a big man, fat. He was his own worst enemy; he died because he didn't take care of himself. He smoked huge cigars. When he was offered the job at the University of Kansas, he said, "Yes, I'll take it, on one condition. I'm going to smoke at my desk here." Well, this is unheard of. He's the only one that I know of, anywhere, who got away with it. As I say, he died of those excesses. It's too bad; he smoked too much, he drank too much, he ate too much. Mostly ate too much. He was a sick man for a long time before he died. He wouldn't give up anything. Anyway, he left that job. He found working in an institution too confining. He went into business, became a rare book dealer, and then he moved to Berkeley, where he had gone to school. Then he really came into his element; he was just fantastic. He had a wonderful shop in San Francisco for a while.

So I knew about Vosper and I knew about Murphy, and I knew about UCLA, and Vosper invited me to come out there. I thought about it and Eleanor and I discussed it, and we thought, "This is great. The children are the right age." Nathaniel was a year old. Freddy Goff gave me his blessings; it was one of the

warmer times that we spent together. I remember that very well. He was different than he usually was, not so cool and removed. He wished me godspeed and all the rest, and we tore up our roots in Washington and left for California. From the minute I saw it, I just loved it. It was 1962, and in 1962 California was a very different place than it is now. You really felt that you were part of a people who were making a new life. There was still a frontier kind of mentality and atmosphere. I was taken up immediately into the circle of bookmen personified by Jake Zeitlin and his close friend Grant Dahlstrom, and Glen and Muir Dawson; it was marvelous. Bob Vosper was the librarian and Franklin Murphy was the chancellor, and Larry Powell was still around.

SMITH: I wanted to ask you if Vosper represented a continuation of the Powell legacy.

EDELSTEIN: Oh yes, absolutely. Even with the same folksy way of talking. And Andy Horn was there. I had this fantastic circle of friends, immediately.

SMITH: And your job was to build up their Renaissance collection.

EDELSTEIN: I became the medieval and Renaissance bibliographer. I made a big splash immediately. I started to put out the bulletin about acquisitions, which was a big success. It seemed so obvious. Anyway, somebody had to do it, and I came there at just the right moment. If it had sold it would have been wonderful, but it was sent out as a library publication. Did I say that I wrote a lot of stuff for the Library of

Congress while I was there?

SMITH: No, you didn't mention that.

EDELSTEIN: I did a lot of writing for the Rare Book Division, and the Library as a whole, and that was nice. Talk about building networks, I mean, that's how your name gets known.

SMITH: So were you housed in the Department of Special Collections?

EDELSTEIN: No, that was totally different.

SMITH: You were with the bibliographers?

EDELSTEIN: With the bibliographers, yes. When I came in 1962 everything was still in the Powell Library. The Undergraduate Research Library was still being planned; it had not gone up yet. So it was a close network there, and I was immediately a part of it. We knew all these people and we had a nice house to live in, and Eleanor was very happy. She took to California. The minute she got off the airplane and saw a palm tree, that was it. Two wonderful years went by.

I did a lot of traveling during those two years. I went to Europe, I was going back to the east coast quite a lot for meetings and one thing or another. New York in those days was everything. California, whatever it was, was not New York. I met a man named Charles [Francis] Gosnell, who was the librarian of NYU, and he offered me the world and New York. He said, "Oh God, if we had somebody like you to take charge we wouldn't be in such a mess. We've got all these rich donors and we don't

know what to do with them. We don't have anybody who knows how to talk to them. We've got all this money." I was seduced by this, and I threw it all up and we came back east. Sometimes I think Eleanor should have been stronger; she should have said no. Maybe she was too good a wife, in a sense. You know, it was my career. She always had things to do, a lot of writing, and young children. Anyway, we uprooted ourselves again.

SMITH: It was a big promotion, right?

EDELSTEIN: Oh yes, I was the head of everything in terms of special collections at NYU. We had a lovely house down in Santa Monica canyon, and as far as I know the children were happy. I know that Eleanor was happy. But I was restless, and I was seduced, and it was New York, it was Washington Square, you know, it was glamorous. In hindsight I think it was foolish, because it didn't work out. Eleanor was unhappy. She'd never liked New York, and she didn't like it then. We had a wonderful apartment in Greenwich Village. Do you know the Sullivan MacDougal Gardens?

SMITH: Where is it located?

EDELSTEIN: Well, picture in your mind's eye, a city block bounded on the north by Bleecker Street, on the south by Houston Street, on the east by Sullivan Street, and on the west by MacDougal Street. To the north was the Café Figaro—bohemians. This was long before hippies and rock stars and all that stuff. There were drunks,

plenty of drunks all right, but it was still the "Village." Then, on these two long side streets, MacDougal and Sullivan, there were flat front brownstones, four storeys high. Beautiful. Back in the 1920s the owners of those brownstones did a wonderful thing. They got together and they merged the back yards so that each house had its own small back yard, but beyond that was a communal oval garden yard that ran the length of the city block. The backs of the Bleecker and Houston Street houses were excluded, but that still left a very long block. When we got to New York, we took a room in the Earl Hotel, a flea bag just off of Washington Square, and got the newspaper and looked at the classified ads, and boom! there it was. For $400, which was an enormous amount of money for us in 1962, somehow or other we swung it.

I don't know how we did it, but we managed, we got this apartment. A Mrs. Norton owned the house, and she lived on the first and second floor. We had the third and fourth floor, and a balcony overlooking the garden. We had storage space in the cellar. Nobody could get to the garden except by going through the houses. It was just wonderful. In the wintertime they'd flood the center part for ice skating, and there were hours when children could play and when they could not play, and it was just marvelous. We made good friends, some of whom last to this day.

Mrs. Norton was wacky, a very moody woman. One day, she said to me, "I don't want to live here anymore. Do you want to buy this house?" And I said, "Yes, how much is it?" And she said something like, $80,000. Whatever it was, we didn't

have it. It was the most serious mistake in my life. Half of one of those houses recently sold for $2,500,000. Half! So we had these two years, but they were not happy. Eleanor didn't like New York. Even though New York was very different then than it is now, it still wasn't clean. There were a lot of drunks around, and every now and then we'd find one in the cellar, or on the front steps. Eleanor had to trudge down two flights of steps with the groceries and with the children, and take the children to Washington Square to play. Sometimes that was good and sometimes it wasn't good. There was the winter weather and New York traffic, and she didn't like it. She felt imprisoned there. I don't think the children did very well there, although my memories are weak on that. I wasn't as observant of the children as I should have been at that time.

Things at the university did not work out as promised. It was nobody's fault but mine; I simply didn't investigate enough. Charles Gosnell didn't lie about anything; he just neglected to tell me the full truth, and after a while I found him not terribly compatible. His principal interest was the history of freemasonry. I'm all for freemasonry, I think it's been an extremely interesting movement, but I'm not interested beyond that. He wanted to recruit me to the Freemasons, and I wasn't interested. He had attained the highest degree of masonry, and he was the archivist of the chapter in New York, which is one of the most important chapters in the world. That was his principal intellectual and social interest, and it sort of left me cold.

He really left me on my own with all these donors that he'd talked about, and it really boiled down to one: Commodore Fales. He was called Commodore because he was Commodore of the New York Yacht Club. He had one of the great yachts of all time and was a great seaman. So, that was something to talk about with him because he knew my father-in-law and he knew the Herreshoff boat yards, and he knew Bristol. Anybody who had anything to do with boating and yachting had a connection to Bristol, because of the Herreshoff yards and the spectacular boats that they built; certainly among the most beautiful boats ever built anywhere. So he was very pleased to see me because as distant and as tenuous as it was in some ways, there was this connection and he liked that. My principal job there was to keep him happy.

He had already made some terrific benefactions to the collections at NYU. As a matter of fact, his collections are really the mainstay of the special collections department. They were right up my alley and I had a marvelous time with them because he was interested in literature. He was very well informed, he was more than just a yachtsman. He was a very successful financier of some highfalutin type that I had no idea about, but I knew he was very rich and he had this beautiful house on 72nd street just off of Lexington. He occupied the whole house, and it was filled with gorgeous things. He lived very well, so he was no fly-by-night in any sense of the word, and he knew as much about literature and books and learning as he did about

yachting and finance. But he was an old man, and he liked to talk, and he liked to be buttered up. He liked things his way. Well, his way was this: whenever he felt like talking I would be summoned.

Two or three times a week I had to have lunch with him, and it was a ritual. Sometimes it was at the Players' Club in Gramercy Park in New York, which is a very important cultural institution; it and the National Arts Club are next door to each other on Gramercy Park South. It's played a significant role in the history of American literature and theater, or in the arts in general. The first couple of times of course I was thrilled to be there and have lunch there, but the thrill palled very quickly after doing this for almost two years. His idea was to call me up and say, "We've got a lot to talk about. Such and such material is coming up for auction and maybe I ought to buy it for the collections." Or, "You've got to tell me what you're doing with the Hemingway manuscripts," and so on. He just wanted to talk; he wanted company. So I'd have to get on the subway and go up to his house, and we'd sit around and talk.

A man named Dave Kirshenbaum was always there, Commodore Fales's favorite dealer in New York. He never did anything without Dave's advice, and he never bid on a book or bought a book even from another dealer without having Dave as his go-between. This used to irritate the hell out of me, because I had all sorts of ways of saving him money and doing things differently, not only differently, but

better. Dave Kirshenbaum was a perfectly wonderful man, and straight as an arrow, but totally unnecessary. Dave would always put his oar in, and he had his own ideas, some of which were self-aggrandizement—not in a bad way, but I thought he was unnecessary and interfering. Of course Dave knew which side the bread was buttered on. Anything the Commodore wanted, he got, and anything he said was right.

So lunch was either at the Players' Club or Dino's Restaurant on Lexington Avenue, just across from Bloomingdale's, between 60th and 61st streets; it's still there. Ed Sullivan was always in there, eating by himself. He had his own table, and he had lunch there, every single day. That was the best part of it, I could tell people I'd seen Ed Sullivan. He and Commodore Fales would talk to each other, but he never came over, and I was never introduced to him. Commodore Fales, being of the same generation and the same kind of interests and background as my father-in-law, always had to have a drink. I didn't want a drink. If I had a drink I was always sorry; it made me sleepy or tipsy or both, but I went along with this. I was gaining weight and all of those things; it just wasn't my kind of thing. Then the meals seemed to get bigger. It just went on and on and on, the talk got more and more useless, and my advice wasn't always being taken.

Fales was a good man, and he was nobody's fool. He was very bright and he knew his stuff. He was as astute and as learned in literary ways as he was in others, and his gifts to NYU were spectacular. So that's one of the great collections there,

thanks to him, and to me. Every now and then I'd find in a shop, or a catalog, or through one connection or another, some other material, and I had a lot of trouble with Gosnell about it. He'd say, "Get Commodore Fales to buy it." I'd say, "Listen, we've got to learn to stand on our own feet. You can raise the money." Sometimes he did and sometimes he didn't. He wasn't a very good librarian, administrator, or anything else. He also drank too much. He and Fales would get together and drink each other under the table. So I was beginning to get very antsy about that.

The other donor, Leslie Frost, daughter of Robert Frost, was very difficult, but in different ways. She had promised all of her stuff to NYU, and it was my job to go over to her place. She lived rather close by, in the Village, where W. H. Auden lived, and one nice by-product was that I got to see Auden a fair bit in his New York days, before he permanently moved over to Austria.

[Tape VI, Side One]

SMITH: You were saying that Eleanor studied with Auden?

EDELSTEIN: Eleanor studied with Auden when she was a student at Bennington, and she had wonderful Auden stories. I saw him through Bob Wilson, who was the owner of the Phoenix Bookshop. He was one of Auden's best friends and the executor of his literary estate.

But Leslie Frost was a very difficult woman. She was generous to NYU, and that's all very nice, but dealing with her was a problem; you had to drag it out of her,

and she was very demanding. I think she was very much like her father, not very nice. I got to know Robert Frost a little bit through her, and he was not this sweet old man, the image that's projected about him. He was a cantankerous, mean person. He could be very vindictive, and not very nice to young poets at all. He had very dark, dark moods, and it comes out in a lot of his poetry, if you really read it. All that talk about woods. Woods can be very dark and menacing.

During those two years in New York, there were several bright spots, but not for Eleanor, unfortunately. I don't think there were any bright spots for her, and this of course made things difficult at home, and that was not good for either one of us and not good for our children. Eleanor really hated it; there were just no two ways about it. And she still does. She resists going to New York for any reason whatsoever. But I had more of a life outside the house than she did. One thing that both of us had in common were the neighbors and the friends that we made in the garden. Our best friend, Connie Bessy, has died; she was a wonderful woman. We were very close to her and saw a lot of her. Our other friends were Ira and Alden Cohen. Ira has died, but Alden Cohen, his widow, still lives in the same house there. Just before Ira died they sold half of the house. They got all that money for just half the house. The house next door to us belonged to Alexander Calder, the sculptor. His daughter went to Bennington with Eleanor. So we'd see Calder from time to time; he'd come to visit his daughter and his grandchildren. Across the garden on the

same side where the Cohens lived was Edgard Varèse, the composer. So there were a lot of interesting people there. So that aspect of it was good, and in addition to that, I was out and I had the university and I had New York. I felt very close to New York because of that year I had spent in the army out there at CCNY. I knew a lot of the city. I spent a lot of time in that city, and probably left Eleanor and the children alone far too long.

Probably every evening I was in the Phoenix Bookshop, which was very near by on Cornelius Street, just over Sixth Avenue from where we were, which was run by Robert Wilson. He's since retired and he lives near St. Michael's on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. It was more than a bookstore; it was a hangout. Everybody hung out there, and I met poets and writers and dancers; this was between '62 and '64. So it wasn't the sixties that we think of with its revolutionary aspects and the hippies and all that kind of thing yet, but things were beginning to bubble. I met everybody under the sun. One of the people who was in there all the time, was Leroi Jones, as he was then called. He became Amiri Baraka later. Denise Levertov was there, and Black Mountain College people would come up to New York.

SMITH: Is this when you began your collecting of small press material?

EDELSTEIN: No, I began that earlier. Actually, I skipped something very important, and I want to go back to it if it's okay.

SMITH: Sure.

EDELSTEIN: While I was at the Library of Congress I went to every poetry reading there was, good, bad, indifferent, and I met a lot of people. One of the poets I met was O. B. Hardison, who became the director of the Folger Library. He was also one of the most eminent scholars of Elizabethan literature that we've ever had in America. Unfortunately he too is now dead. I had made little forays into English literature, and I had this wonderful experience in high school with my teacher, Mr. Pentz, in English literature, but I really felt that I had missed out on a lot, and it was thanks to O. B. that windows opened up that I hadn't even approached before.

Sometime during the late fifties a man named Jonathan Williams came to live in Washington for a few months to try to promote his books, and we met. He was a Black Mountain College product. I can't remember how I first heard of him or knew of him, to tell you the truth. Jonathan is one of the great men that I know, and I've known a lot of them. I've been very lucky. Like a lot of great men he can be disturbing to say the least, and a real pain in the ass. He's very self-centered. I think maybe they have to be, to become great, in some ways. I'm doing a book about Jonathan and his press, which is called Jargon. Everything has a life and death of its own and I think wise people come to realize that, and I think Jonathan should stop doing what he's doing and maybe do something else, or maybe do nothing for a while. But in its heyday, from the mid-fifties until fairly recently the Jargon imprint, under Jonathan's direction, has been synonymous with what is avant-garde in American

literature, particularly American poetry. It has a board of advisers and a board of directors, and I've been a member of one or other of those boards almost since the time I met Jonathan. I'm not a member of either one right now, but I'm the official bibliographer of Jargon. Sooner or later I'll finish this work that I'm doing about Jonathan and his books. Jay [James] Laughlin, the founder and director of New Directions, which in itself is generally considered synonymous with the literary avant-garde, said somewhere, "When I want to find out what's new I look at Jargon." Which is pretty high praise, huh?

So Jonathan and I became friends almost immediately when we met. He was living on Capitol Hill in an apartment, trying to promote Kenneth Patchen. Jonathan takes on causes, and he devotes himself to them, very often to the detriment of his own work and to that of Jargon. He's an interesting poet himself, but I think it sometimes gets in the way of other things. I think his most important role is as publisher and director of Jargon; he is a man who, somehow or another, has these incredible antennae, so that he can sense what's new and different. He's very strange about it; he totally rejects anything which is brought to his attention. He's very selfish in that way. If he doesn't discover it for himself, it remains undiscovered, no matter who you are and how well qualified you are to judge and bring it to his attention. Which is not good, and he's been told this by many, many people, but that didn't change him. His great contribution is this fantastic ability he has, and it's not only in

terms of literature. He knows all the baseball box scores and he can spot a raw talent just as he can spot a great work of art. He has a fantastic collection of Appalachian folk art—really superb stuff.

He spends a lot of time on his own poetry, which takes up so little intellectual space, in a way, and the theme is so specialized; it's the world of the homosexual poet. It's no secret that Jonathan is homosexual. He's had two marriages, so to speak, with two interesting men. The first was Ronald Johnson, who is a great poet himself, and they split up twenty some years ago. Thomas Meyer, also a poet, is living with him. I don't think he's a great poet, but Jonathan thinks he is. He's too scholarly, actually, that's his problem. He knows too much about myth and folklore, and there's too much scholarship in his work, rather than art. There are a lot of people like that. But he's very, very nice. Ronald Johnson is not only one of the important poets of our time in America, but he's also one of the great cooks, and Tom Meyer's not bad either; I guess this is one of the things that Jonathan looks for in his companions. Ronald has published some fantastic cookbooks. They're not only wonderful recipes, but they are beautifully written, and I think a good many of them are published by Knopf; they are very handsome books.

Jonathan, his work, and the Jargon society have occupied a big place in my life since we met. I've spent a lot of time with Jonathan, helping him, doing the things that a member of the board does—always trying to raise money. When I was a

member of the board, I, along with people who knew a great deal more about the financial situation than I did, told him the society would be better off if we just gave the books away instead of trying to sell them. We printed these small editions and they never sold. A handful of people bought them, just like the handful of people who buy poetry. Poetry is published as window dressing for the big publishers; it's a prestige kind of thing to the name of a publishing house. So the society would really be better to declare itself a kind of charity, whatever the laws would allow it to do, and give the stuff away, we'd be much better off.

SMITH: It wasn't always that way. I think particularly in the 50s and 60s poetry sold at a much greater level than it does now.

EDELSTEIN: Yes, yes it did, that's true. But not Jargon. The first time that a Jargon book made money was when it published a cookbook, by that Mississippi fellow; that was the first and only time. But Jargon published Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov, Paul Metcalf (one of the really important, underappreciated writers of our time), Charles Olson, Joel Oppenheimer—you know, remarkable stuff. Jargon published their first books, you see.

SMITH: But the first three that you name I know went over to New Directions.

EDELSTEIN: Oh yes, they were picked up later. New Directions has big distribution. In the early years Jargon was done out of the back of Jonathan Williams's station wagon. That's how he distributed them. He drove around the

country in his station wagon, gave readings, and after the readings he said, "Here are the books, they're for sale." You know, that kind of thing. Although it's a little more sophisticated now, it doesn't sell. Some of the photography stuff and the stuff on Appalachian folklorists sells, but he spends most of his time raising money.

Jonathan lives half the year in North Carolina, in a beautiful place called Highlands, way in the southwest corner of the state, near the Georgia border. The other half of the year he lives in the Yorkshire Dales, in England. One of the things that has kept him and Jargon going is that he has been lucky over the years to have patrons. For a long time, in North Carolina, Philip Hanes, of the Hanes underwear and women's stockings family was a great patron of Jonathan's.

Hanes was succeeded as a patron by Donald Anderson, the brother of Robert Anderson, who was secretary of the treasury at one time. The family founded ARCO. Don Anderson and Robert Anderson have separate fortunes. Donald is not in Robert's class, but he's still a multi, multi millionaire. He started the artist's colony and museum in Roswell, New Mexico. This house I spoke of in the Yorkshire Dales belongs to Don. He said to Jonathan and to Tom Meyer, "Look, I want a place in England where I can come with my family and we can walk"—he's a great walker and hiker—"so you go find it. I'll pay the bills." It's a sixteenth-century stone cottage, which looks like a sheepherder's cottage when you see it from the outside, but when you go inside it is luxurious. It even has a sauna. It's wonderful. They've built on it

and fixed it all up, and now they have two cottages, because Don has a big family. Donald Anderson is a very nice man.

So, I back-tracked because of that, but it played a very, very large part in my life. When I retired from the Getty I was going to come back and we were going to live here and I've got a lot of work to do, but I got this invitation from Brown and it seemed so attractive to have an institutional affiliation. When Norman Fiering, the director, said, "Well, you're going to come back and live in Bristol, Rhode Island, anyway, and Providence is fifteen miles away." Having a university affiliation opens a lot of doors, and you have a card to identify you. You can go here and there, and have the run of the campus, the university library, the swimming pool, all those kinds of things. So I said yes. And then a second offer came to teach a course next semester. I should have turned that down, because it means so much work, but I've learned a lot, and I really feel that I ought to share some of it with younger people. So I'm developing this course on the history of the book. I've become much more interested in things like reception theory and the history of reading, and I'll mix all that in. It's an interesting group that I've become associated with at the university. And then of course I've got this year's consultantship to the Getty still, and that will take up some time.

There are really three things that remain uncompleted, and I've got to get to them. I have an obligation to myself, and I have a particular obligation to the

Guggenheim, because years ago, before I left the National Gallery of Art, I got a Guggenheim grant to do a book about Harry Duncan and the Cummington Press, and I've never finished it. I think about it all the time; I have this ethical obligation, in addition to which I think I have something to say. Don Tansel, the vice-president of the Guggenheim Foundation, says with a certain amount of amusement in his voice that I'm in very good company, that a lot of people they have given grants to have never finished the work they said they were going to do. But that's no solace or consolation.

Harry Duncan is I think one of the most important figures in the tale of American twentieth-century literature, poetry especially, combined with his magnificent skill and eye as a typographer and a printer. He has probably put out some of the most beautiful books that we have. He doesn't just reprint the Song of Songs, or the Declaration of Independence, as so many of our fine printers do. Every single one of his books is the discovery of an interesting and sometimes great and important talent. He has a spectacular ability to spot new talent, the kind of thing that Jonathan has, without the avant garde element. Harry Duncan's taste is a little more traditional, shall I say, but nonetheless important. He and his disciples don't print books unless they are of interesting new writers, or new literature. This is what makes Harry and the Cummington Press and all the other ones that he has spawned so interesting, and I think it's a story that needs to be told. Everybody agrees with me,

and I have far too many people urging me to finish this book, which I have got to do. So I don't know why I have taken on all these other things.

So that's Harry and I've got to finish this book about Jonathan. Aside from anything else, people are waiting for these books, so I won't have any trouble finding publishers or distributors, and I probably could make some money, which, God knows, we certainly need at this point in our lives. And then, to stand on the other foot that I've always stood on, with respect to the tension—I like this word that you introduced—there is another long-standing project that I've yet to complete, which involves a man that I've been interested in for years, a late fifteenth-century Florentine figure named Vespasiano da Bisticci. Have you ever heard of him?

SMITH: No.

EDELSTEIN: Well, there's no reason why you should have. Vespasiano da Bisticci was a very influential figure in late fifteenth-century Florence. He was by profession a scribe and an illuminator. He had a bookshop and stationary shop as they often were combined in Florence, and his shop was a hangout. In the same way that I hung out at the Phoenix Bookshop in New York in the sixties, people hung out at Vespasiano da Bisticci's shop just behind the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence in the second half of the fifteenth century. These were people like Cosimo de' Medici and Leonardo de' Medici and the guy who became Pope Nicolas V. The Emperor Corvinus would come down from Budapest. They all came to find out what was the latest book that

the Greek scholars had brought over, or that somebody had found and unearthed, and what new manuscript he had that was available for copying, or they would want a manuscript illuminated.

Philosophers, kings, popes, cardinals, politicians, wool merchants—everybody hung out in Vespasiano's shop, you see, and they would talk about the new humanistic discoveries. He was the man who formed great libraries, which are great today. He formed the library that Cosimo de' Medici put together. He formed the library that Lorenzo put together, which is now the Lorenziana in Florence, part of which was designed by Michelangelo—that great stairway. And he formed the great library of the Duke of Urbino, Federico da Montefeltro, which was plundered later by the Vatican and is now part of the Vatican Library. In addition to all of that, he wrote a very important book sketching the lives of his illustrious contemporaries. It was a very self-serving book. He told lots of lies to illustrate how important he was in their lives, how he advised them in all of their activities, how friendly he was with every one of them, and how he formed these great libraries. Much of which was true, much of which was also exaggerated.

Now, this is a book which really was not known. Fragments had been known ever since he wrote it, but it really wasn't known until it was discovered by Jacob Burckhardt in manuscript form in the Vatican Library in the late nineteenth century, just before Burckhardt wrote his great *Civilization of the Renaissance*. Since then,

thanks to its own merits as well as to the highly significant role it plays in Burckhardt's book, the memoria of Vespasiano da Bisticci remain to this very day one of the primary sources for the theory of the Renaissance in Italy, especially Florence. This is a story that everybody knows, but believe it or not, it has never been written down. The only biography that exists of Vespasiano was written many years ago by some cleric. It's in Italian, it's never been translated, and it's not very good. It leaves out an awful lot, and it's a very dull book. A lot of Vespasiano material is now available in the state archives in Florence and in the Vatican.

Vespasiano employed the best illuminators and the best scribes and he had a very important influence on the development of printing—a negative influence, but sometimes negative influences are just as significant to remark upon as positive ones. Here you have the city of Florence, which was avant-garde in so many ways with respect to art. Everything from double-entry bookkeeping to art and architecture and commerce and wool manufacturing. When you think of the Italian Renaissance, you think of Florence first of all, in every respect but printing. Everywhere else in Italy, printing had taken off like a rocket. Well, the reason it didn't in Florence is that it was held back by people like Vespasiano da Bisticci. He wasn't the only scribe and illuminator, but he was the foremost. It was a matter of pure commerce. Printing was the death knell to their scriptoria. Who was going to commission a magnificent manuscript when you could buy one of these books that looked just as good? The

point of the early printers was to make their books look as much like the manuscript as possible; that was the whole idea. The early books were almost as expensive as manuscripts, to be sure, but they could see the writing on the wall, or the print on the page, as it were, and knew that sooner or later this was going to put them out of business and they tried to make it as "later" as possible and they succeeded. Vespasiano died in 1497, and he left the business, because he could feel the hot breath of the printers on the back of his neck, and the competition was beginning to get keen. But it wasn't until very, very late in the fifteenth century, unlike the rest of Italy, that Florence began to produce printed books in quantity and quality.

I have been bickering with Marsilio, an Italian publishing house in Venice and in New York. They still haven't come up with a contract like they should. I think if they don't come up with it I could get somebody else to do it, because everybody's interested in the story. So I ought to do this , and I have a lot of encouragement. Do you know Luigi Ballerini, at UCLA? He's the chairman of the Italian department.

SMITH: No.

EDELSTEIN: He's one of the directors of the Marsilio publishing house. It's run in New York by Umberto Eco's son. They're not very efficient, but I keep being urged by those people to do something about this book. We want to put out an *en face* edition; you know, Italian on one side and English on the other, a selection from the memoria. It's only been published once in English, and that was a long, long time

ago, 1909, so the English is quite antiquated.

SMITH: That sounds like something that the Getty could publish.

EDELSTEIN: It could be. I never talked to them about it, I don't know.

SMITH: So you have these three projects.

EDELSTEIN: I have these three projects, and I'm not doing a damn thing.

SMITH: They also seem like the summation of your career.

EDELSTEIN: They are, very much so. I haven't thought about it that way, but I suppose they are.

SMITH: They draw on things that have been concerning you for many years.

EDELSTEIN: Many years, yes. There are these other little side things, like these postcards; they're just for my amusement. I never thought I would have a hobby. I always used to laugh at people who had hobbies.

SMITH: Naturally people at the Getty said, "You have to ask him about his post-card collection."

EDELSTEIN: Do you want to hear about it now?

SMITH: Actually, I want to pursue some other things, and maybe get back to New York in '66, and your decision that you had to get out of there.

EDELSTEIN: Right, there we were in New York—God, I sort of forgot about that for a moment. That's right, I left Washington in '62, went to UCLA, then left to go back to New York, because I'm convinced it's not the right thing to do, but—

SMITH: It sounds like the extra-university, extra-family life in New York was very rich for you.

EDELSTEIN: Not the university, but New York was.

SMITH: Richer than what Los Angeles had to offer you.

EDELSTEIN: Yes, in some ways it was. Los Angeles had a lot to offer me in terms of pure academic material, the book world in the strictest sense, in the bibliographic and the bibliophilic sense. What New York offered me was a real connection with the literary life, with people who created people.

SMITH: Of course there was a literary life in California at that time; did you have connections?

EDELSTEIN: Oh yes, I had, but not in as immediate a way as I did in New York.

[Tape VI, Side Two]

EDELSTEIN: New York was alive. It was not just literary life. There was film, theater, and dance groups. Everything passed through the Village and everything passed through Bob Wilson's bookshop or St. Mark's Playhouse—it was rich. But I knew that it wouldn't last and when you come right down to it, I was a bystander. I was a good audience, and art needs an audience. If you don't hear the tree fall, then you can't say anything about it. So it was good in that respect, and I gained a lot from it.

SMITH: So you returned to L. A., fortunately.

EDELSTEIN: I return thanks to the effort of three people: Andy Horn, Bob Vosper, and Franklin Murphy.

SMITH: Well, Franklin was the Chancellor.

EDELSTEIN: But I didn't go directly to him, but in the end he made it possible for Bob Vosper and Andy to get what they wanted, and what they wanted was to get me back, because I pounded on them.

SMITH: You told them you had made a mistake.

EDELSTEIN: I said I made a mistake. And they said they'd do everything they could. It took a year. I asked them at the end of the first year. You know, jobs weren't sitting around waiting just for me. There had to be an opening, and money.

SMITH: You stayed at UCLA almost a decade, minus the two years. UCLA is a library that was built virtually from nothing in the course of a generation. For my interests it is one of the best libraries in the country.

EDELSTEIN: Right.

SMITH: I was wondering, from your perspective, what were the factors that were making the UCLA library go in the direction that it was going, so that it wasn't a typical university library?

EDELSTEIN: Well, you know, the answer to that is very simple. I strongly believe, and there are many people who share my belief, that libraries are built by people. They are not built by committees, and they are not built by rules, whether they are

arbitrary or fixed rules. You cannot draw up a set of directions on how to build a library. You can write down what you've learned, certain basic things that one needs to do, but these things are not really much more complex than anything common sense would tell you. The answer to your question is not unlike the answer to your question about what makes a good rare book librarian. If you think of the great libraries that exist, they have been made by a combination of circumstances which have been facilitated by having the right people in place. You can build a great library if you have an infinite amount of time, by buying a book here, a book there, a manuscript here, a manuscript there, but you really have to operate in infinite terms to do it that way.

The great libraries are built by buying or acquiring—acquiring is a generic term which covers anything. You gather, you recognize, you find, you acquire, through gift, exchange, purchase—whatever the word "acquire" covers—what somebody else has already collected. If you think in your mind of all the great university, research, or private libraries that you know, that's the way they've been built. Mr. Folger comes along, with his collection of sixty-two folios, and somebody has the astuteness to start building a library from it. I've forgotten the name of that wonderful first director of the Folger Library, who preceded O. B. Hardison. He recognized what was there and its potential, got it and then put it in order. The ordering of a library, the way that you put it on a shelf and make it available to

scholarship, is a very, very important part of the process of the creation of a library. First you recognize the potential, convince somebody that it belongs to the world and shouldn't be dispersed or junked, but should be there where it can blossom. All of those things are part of the picture.

Afterwards, one must know how to really make that access a reality. I'm not talking about the fine tuning of cataloging or anything like that. There are technicians that handle that sort of thing. I don't mean to decry their work; there are technicians in every discipline and they're very important. But that's in a sense a detail. I don't feel that any aspect of the work of librarianship or any archival discipline, even if it's just pasting labels on or stamping due dates in the book that you get in the public library, is something to be sneered at; these are respectable and important professions and occupations and they have their place. But we are talking about something else, in that I'm limiting my remarks to the acquisition of materials and to how you're going to, in a sense, display them.

You may decide not to buy a magnificent collection because at a given time you don't have the space for it, or at a given time you don't have the staff that has to process it. There are two schools of thought about this in the library world. In some ways, the people who are at the top and who make these decisions in the library world have too much to say about it, because sometimes if you leave this kind of thing to an educated layman you get a better answer. If the person in charge is of the

school that believes every book you have should be processed and on the shelf and in order as soon as possible, and/or all the time, you may have a great library in terms of what it already has, but you have a library that grows slowly and has an unlimited limited future in store for it, if you know what I mean.

If you have a librarian who is more adventurous, and maybe not quite so focused on the problems of processing and storage, and is willing to bet on the future, assuming that money is not the question, then you have someone who is willing to say, "We'll never have an opportunity like this again. So what if this collection stays in storage for ten years?" Even if the collection wasn't fully available, maybe it could be put online, and you would have the bookseller's description, which can't always be trusted, but it's better than nothing. If somebody who was an expert in the field of that collection came in, they would know whether the bookseller's description was good enough, and they would be able to find what they wanted in that unprocessed collection, because they would know the material. They would be overjoyed to have that collection, because they would recognize its potential. So that's a different attitude. I'm sure you can tell by the level of my voice that it's an attitude that I have, but it's not embraced by everybody. I would have to say that one position is as often voiced as the other. There are many libraries which operate according to the first school of thought I described, and they are important institutions of learning, of research and of scholarship, but somehow I find that they

lack a certain élan, a certain excitement and spirit.

SMITH: But libraries, and I'm thinking of the UCLA library in particular, can switch from one to the other in a matter of a few years.

EDELSTEIN: Absolutely, and it has, as you know. As you know, we live in our own history, and we reflect our times, so a lot of it is a function of the times that we live in. I believe that greatness lies in recognizing that, but not necessarily lying down and totally accepting it. If you don't have the money, and UCLA does not have the money to do what it did in the glory days, there are other ways of acquiring material. But you've got to concentrate on it, you can't just have a biannual "friends" meeting and send out a flyer and hope that the good people of this world will search their shelves for the odd book to give, or drop $200 into the friends' group as an annual contribution. You've got to assertively and aggressively go out and do something about it. It takes a lot of work.

It's much easier if you have the money. People in the trade are not stupid; collectors' organizations and private people know what's going on, and they know where the money is. My popularity at the Getty was not based solely, if at all, on my lovely disposition and pleasing personality. I represented the Getty. I'm sure a lot of people came to me who may have hated my guts for some reason, but they knew that I controlled a big budget. But I'm talking about what a librarian who is in straitened circumstances can do if he or she is imaginative and creative. If times are bad, one

can create all kinds of programs that bring a sparkle to the library, even without spectacular acquisitions.

Nothing should ever stand in the way of exhibitions which really say something in new, attractive, and imaginative ways. Very few library exhibitions are worth the name, very few. Who wants to go look at an exhibition of books that are open to a title page, and you look at the label underneath it tells you what's on the title page in a different arrangement of letters? That's ridiculous. I compare it to those art historians who show you a slide and say, "Now you see the Virgin with the Christ child in her left arm. Next slide, please. And now you see the Virgin with the Christ child in her right arm." Tell me why this is significant. What does it mean? There's an awful lot of art history that is taught just that way. This is a copy of Horace Walpole's memoirs [showing book], first edition, printed by himself, and it says so on the title page, so why do you need a label underneath that tells you the same thing? [laughter] Tell us that Walpole was an eighteenth-century aesthete who created his own world there at Strawberry Hill. Tell us how he was representative of his time and his contemporaries. What did his contemporaries think of him? What did the guy down the street from Strawberry Hill think of Horace Walpole, and why is this book different from other books?

I'm just picking at straws, but most library exhibits are as dull as ditch water, and as a matter of fact it's very rare that an exhibit of books alone is really interesting.

The essence of a book is what's *in it*, and if it's a book which is valued and important only because it's a beautiful object in itself, you can't see much of it in a glass case, and there's no other way to look at it because if ten people handled it, in ten minutes its value would be immediately destroyed. It's an art object, and it has to be protected. You wouldn't hand around a drawing by Raphael for people to get their gritty fingers and oily hands on, any more than you would a fine book. But most rare books are important because of what's in them, or what they represent.

If all you're interested in is reading Thomas Paine's *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, you can go out to any college bookstore and get it in paperback. Okay. But there is something significant about seeing this object as it was presented to the world for the very first time. It's everybody's credo, sort of taken for granted. "The rights of man," is a part of our language, but where did it come from? Who first coined the phrase, "rights of man"? I don't know if it was Thomas Paine, but we know that there it is in that title and we know that book. You can make exhibitions really live, but most of them are terrible. I don't know anything more dull than having to look at the backs of books, and exhibits that show the backs of books, to me, are a waste of my time. I've reached a point where I don't have to go anymore to book exhibits, and I don't. I don't go unless I have to, let me put it that way. I'm seldom interested in looking at books under glass, unless it's something that I've never seen before, an illustration or a type font, or an arrangement of a page, or just because I've never seen

that book before and here is an opportunity to see one little piece of it. A book is a living thing, and it should speak to you. It should answer your questions and there should be a give and take.

SMITH: I'd like to get back to some more specific things about UCLA. For instance, what was your involvement with Elmer Belt? Did you help him build his library?

EDELSTEIN: My involvement with him was very close. Of course, the main part of the library was built by the time I got there, but I worked very closely with Elmer and with Kate Steinitz, Jake Zeitlin, and Bob Vosper. The collection had been pretty much formed, but I did help them add a few pieces to it when I was there in California. The use of the [Elmer] Belt Library [of Vinciana] was not very good because it wasn't really available. When URL was built, and the Belt room installed, there was [some use], but then things began to go down somewhat. It bothered me that this stuff was there, in this pretty room, not being used. Actually, it was not really a very pretty room. I don't think it was very well designed; it was too off-putting. Everybody, I'm sure even the rawest undergraduate, had heard of Leonardo da Vinci, but that wasn't enough to know something about this fascinating man and all of his interests and accomplishments and so on. The Belt room was the typical treasure room in a university library: dark, with heavy furniture.

I was part of the group that [tried to enliven] that room, and we didn't really

succeed. I wanted to lighten it up, I wanted those books out of there, on exhibition, which I've just said I don't think is entirely satisfactory, but still it's better than nothing, and I wanted to have lectures in there, and other events. I wanted young people to come in there and find something exciting and have some contact with Leonardo da Vinci. There was an attempt made for a while, but then it fell by the wayside, and I just had too many other things to do. I couldn't really pursue it. But to this day I think it's kind of wasted, and the university doesn't take advantage of it, and it doesn't add anything.

I think a library which doesn't add anything isn't alive. There are all kinds of ways to add; you don't have to have a lot of money. It's very easy to build a great library if you have all the money in the world, so I don't take as much credit as people like to think I do, or want to even give me, for the work I did at the Getty. It wasn't all that hard. I had all the money in the world. But the things that I got were truly wonderful, and it's true that you can spend money wisely, or foolishly, so maybe I'm being hard on myself. Nevertheless, I had all this money, which made things easier, and I think I spent it wisely. The Belt Library had all these original resources of Vincian studies, but there were all kinds of [other] things that they could have had. There were even caricatures. I had an idea to have a little exhibition of caricatures of Leonardo—things that made fun of him. They said we couldn't do that; it wasn't serious. Okay, that didn't work. Then there were other things like that. And now,

UCLA, which has one of the great collections known on Leonardo da Vinci, is selling one of the few Leonardo codices.

SMITH: I don't think it's UCLA that's selling the codex, it's the [Armand] Hammer Foundation. Are you talking about the Codex Hammer?

EDELSTEIN: Yes. It's UCLA's. He gave it to the university. One of the things that he gave that he couldn't take back.

SMITH: I thought it was the Hammer Foundation that was selling it.

EDELSTEIN: No I don't think so. It would be interesting to find out for sure which it is. I think it's UCLA—or it may be a combination.

SMITH: If it's UCLA, it's criminal.

EDELSTEIN: Yes, it's true. This is a codex which is not primarily "artistic." Put that in quotes. It's Leonardo's writings and his drawings, these little marginalia, about hydraulics; mostly about taming the Arno and various hydraulic inventions and dreams that he had. He had a big scheme for controlling the Arno, you know, which every hundred years or so floods disastrously, the way it did in 1966. If I'm right and it is UCLA, and I think it is, certainly partially, $2,000,000 is all they're going to get, if they get that, because the money isn't around anymore like it was in the eighties. Even if it's not Leonardo the artist, it's Leonardo the engineer; it's still Leonardo, and it is an original prime document. To sell that just doesn't seem right, it seems to me they're selling themselves short, and there are all kinds of things that you could do

with it. So I don't know, I think it's very, very shortsighted.

SMITH: What was your involvement with the collecting of the Aldines, which UCLA is very proud of, and which Franklin Murphy was very personally involved in?

EDELSTEIN: Well, my involvement there was marginal, to tell you the truth, because that really took off after I left. My involvement was always a large one, but as an outside adviser, up to the day that Franklin died. He would call me up, he would ask me what I thought, this dealer or that price, had I seen that copy, you know, that kind of thing. So I was involved to that extent, and then in my last days at UCLA, till 1972, I began to buy. When I came back, I came with a different title. I became the humanities bibliographer for the University Research Library, and a lecturer in the library school. This was Andy Horn's doing of course, and Bob Vosper's. They worked it out together.

SMITH: So you had an official faculty position?

EDELSTEIN: Yes, I was officially a member of the school faculty. I only got one salary, but I think that's the way they did it because probably one or the other couldn't have managed the full salary, so they pooled the money, and that was that. It was a very nice arrangement for me. Especially if I wanted to not be found, I could always be in the other place. [laughter] I was in the Powell Building [as well as URL] so that worked out very, very nicely. I enjoyed the teaching very much, and I developed a course that maybe, if I continue to teach I'll do again—although I'm not really as

interested as I was. It was a course that had never been taught before, anywhere, and it became very popular. It was on the history of publishing and the book trade. When I left and Bob Vosper started to teach, he kept it up for a while and used my notes and syllabus. It was very successful. A lot of students from different departments in the university came: the English department, history, as well as the library. I've forgotten how many years I did that.

SMITH: What were your goals for that class? What did you want the students to get out of it?

EDELSTEIN: I wanted them to understand what the book trade was all about and what publishing meant. What does a publisher do? Why does a book have to be published? How does it get to the newsstand, how does it get to the bookshop? Most people see a book in a bookstore, or a magazine on a newsstand, and they don't know how it got there. They have no idea of what's involved. So that was a small goal. My larger goal was to try to instill some awareness and understanding that all of this was an aspect of cultural history, and this was a counterpart of the history of literacy, and of reading. Those were generally my goals as I try to think of it. So I was very happy with that, and maybe I'll try to do it again, but to tell you the truth, one's interests change, and I would have to develop a new course. It was twenty years ago and we know a lot more now and things have changed.

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